THE ELITE ARCHIVES

Backer Preview Edition

PART I

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Elite copyright Ian Bell and David Braben, 1984.

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Author's Note (Backer Preview Version):

Greetings Commanders!

Backing a Kickstarter comes with inherent risk. What if the end product is rubbish? What if it's not what you had hoped for? Worse of all, what if you never receive anything? I've backed many Kickstarters over the years, and not all of them have delivered in quality, even a few did not deliver at all. Unfortunately a few of them were ELITE related. I had feared that many other Commanders had suffered the same experience and perhaps would not see fit to lend support to this project. I was proved wrong as 291 strangers (and 2 friends) showed faith in the project.

I set up The ELITE Archives website back in 2013 to begin covering the vast and varied conversions of ELITE that spanned well over a decade. There were already some great sites in existence, but none that I could turn to to find out about all of the different versions and conversions of ELITE. So I decided to launch my own. From this grew the idea to produce a book that covers the real-world history of ELITE from the beginning right through to Elite: Dangerous in the present day. The task seemed well defined, and relatively easy to achieve. Like many who embark on these crazy Kickstarter journeys, I underestimated the amount of work and research involved.

It has taken far longer than planned to reach this point, and it seemed only right to concentrate on finishing 'Part I', covering up to the last version of 'original' ELITE, and delivering the PDF to you this year. I had hoped to get a little closer to a finished product to give you, but then part of this 'Backer Preview' version is to share the creative process and seek your input to improve the end product (after all, this is our history of ELITE too).

So here I present the almost finished and very unpolished The ELITE Archives Part I.

Your mission, should you choose to accept it, is to read Part I with a critical eye. This version has already been read through by a couple of kind volunteers who have helped correct and shape the document along with those who were due a 'Penultimate' version. The majority of changes have now been incorporated and I would like you to suggest any other material that I may have missed. I would also ask of you to take note of any errors of fact and let me know. Finally, if there are some elements that you particularly like, please do let me know.

I am currently busy finalising Part II, which will go to 'Penultimate' backers first, then be circulated a short while later to all backers like this preview copy. Following a similar peer review process, I will make all of the necessary changes and then the complete Archives will go to Commander Dan of Fantastic Books Publishing who will begin their editorial and publication type processes to add the polish to this historical tome.

Thank you once again for support.

Onwards!

Anthony,

On behalf of The ELITE Archives.

Chapter One

Before ELITE

"ELITE is the program that couldn't have been written"

Sophie Wilson, Grand thieves and Tomb Raiders

ELITE

Before ELITE...

David Braben was just eighteen years old when he was given a £120 Acorn Atom as a Christmas present from his parents in 1981.

He had requested the Acorn Atom as a kit of parts that included a motherboard with a Mostek 6502 processor, some cables and a keyboard. He had requested the kit partly because a ready assembled Atom cost £170, which was significantly less than the BBC Microcomputer that cost £399.

In a television interview for the BBC, Braben said of the Atom: "It was a fascinating device, and I think it really captured my imagination"

Although the Atom used the same processor as the BBC Microcomputer, it was configured to run slower. It did have the same fundamental architecture that allowed a level of transportable code between the two machines.

Braben increased the standard 2kB of memory of his machine that he used to write a nuclear war game that he based on Missile Command.

Meanwhile, Ian Colin Graham Bell at age nineteen was planning to go to Cambridge to begin his degree, after taking a gap-year to work at his father's office at the Malaysian Rubber Producer's Research Association.

Braben also attended Jesus College where he met Bell. Both were programming games on Acorn machines, Braben on the Atom, and Bell on the far more powerful BBC Microcomputer.

Reversi

Bell wrote the code for a computer version of Othello using 6502 assembly language. The game ran so fast that he had to artificially slow the game down. He sent a copy of Othello to Program Power.

Program Power played Ian's version against another that had also arrived. The other version beat his at the higher difficulty levels. This was due to Ian making up the game strategies.

Bell's version performed better at the lower levels of difficulty and it also ran faster and smoother.

Program Power announced that they would release both. Bell's version of Othello was released as 'Reversi' and it is thought that only a few hundred copies were sold.

Free Fall

Bell wrote the game Free Fall for the BBC Micro-computer during 1982-83. Acornsoft published Free Fall in 1983.

Free Fall is game of survival onboard a space station that has been attacked by alien life forms known as 'Alphoids.' The Alphoids have contaminated the air with deadly cyanide. Only a single crewmember was able to put on their space suit in time. Weaponless, the survivor must fight his way through the aliens by punching, kicking or ramming them.

Free Fall was also released for the Acorn Electron.

Elite Beginnings

After Braben showed his early space game work to Bell, Bell quickly set to work improving the code to increase the graphics speed and to display multiple space ships simultaneously.

Braben and Bell worked together to develop the game further. They added the ability to fire at space ships and created the combat mechanics. The explosions that appeared once a ship was destroyed are said to be lifted from Free Fall.

Rather than the normal (at the time) three lives plus an additional life every 10,000 points, Braben wanted something different. The answer came in the form of money. Instead of scoring more points for destroying enemy ships, the player would receive a bounty in the form of credits.

But what to do with all of this money?

You started the game with a ship equipped with a certain configuration of weapons and systems, but if you could use the money earned by shooting enemy ships to upgrade your own? And what if you could collect cargo from the wreckage?

One of the pivotal aspects of the game was born. Trading. Trading in cargo bought at one station and sold at another. Trading in cargo scooped from wrecked ships. Trading to improve one's standing in the galaxy by better equipping one's ship.

The idea of trading is often compared to that used in the role playing game Traveller that was played by Bell. Braben played a similar style of role playing game called Space Opera, which also used a commodoties trading mechanic.

Whatever the source for trading, one thing is certain, the name of the default character in Elite, Commander Jameson, is a definite nod to Traveller.

But credits were not the only score in the game. There was also a combat rating that was introduced, and THIS became the most important aspect of the game, especially to the kids in the playground who would go on to play Elite once it was released.

"They came up with their own method that made use of the machine's limitations..."

The first two combat ratings, Harmless and Mostly Harmless were a nod to Douglas Adams' Hitchhikers Guide to the Galaxy. The highest level, Elite, became the name of the game. Players started out as Harmless, but once they had racked up a huge 6,400 kills (on the BBC and a few others at least) the player became Elite.

Bell and Braben had some huge obstacles to overcome to make their game playable. The line drawing routine on the BBC Microcomputer was very capable at drawing lines, but it used a computationally intensive process that would bring Elite to a crawl. So they came up with their own method that made use of the machines' limitations of an 8-bit processor.

Elite's main display area is exactly 256 by 256 pixels. The reason being that 2^8 = 256 so any calculations within that limit are comparatively fast, go outside the 256 pixel limit and the calculation complexity increases drastically thereby slowing the drawing routine.

All of the ships in Elite have one thing in common. They are all symmetrical about their fore-aft axis. This means that calculations relating to one half of the ship could be mirrored about the axis to draw the other half. This was another small saving in processing power which translated to an increase in drawing speed.

The opposite side of a ship, that part which couldn't be seen, did not even need to be drawn.

The BBC Microcomputer had a characteristic whereby a programmer wanting a coloured display would need to either reduce resolution, or sacrifice the speed at which the graphics moved.

mode could be used at a time. A coloured display with a palette of black, white, red and yellow could be achieved using MODE 5, but doing so would slow down the main combat display. But what if the main combat could be displayed in black and white, and the colour only be used for the lower console?

Braben and Bell found a way to have both.

The main display used MODE 4 which enabled high speed, high detail graphics. The lower part used MODE 5 that allowed the use of colour. The BBC manual said that they couldn't be used at the same time. Technically they weren't. The trick was to switch modes partway through the screen-draw routine. The top part was drawn using MODE 4 and then the machine was switched to MODE 5 just in time to draw the lower radar and flight information console in colour.

Time was against Bell and Braben to develop the game as others could come up with something first. Once they knew 3D was possible they were constantly alert for any news of other 3D games. Then it came. News of a new 3D game to hit the market on the ZX Spectrum called 3D Monster Maze.

It turned out to be a pretty decent game, but it wasn't truly 3D. The images were drawn on the screen as one would draw a 3D perspective on a piece of paper. It looked 3D, but the player wasn't really inside the 3D world. They couldn't look and move in any direction like the ship in Elite.

The game was almost completed before they took it to a publisher for consideration. And the publisher they chose to go to first was none other than one of the biggest publishing houses in the UK at the time, Thorn EMI. Braben knew one of the people who worked there, and so was able to arrange a demonstration.

The meeting did not go well. The executives saw a game that didn't have three lives and it didn't have a conventional score system like the arcade games, and that was going to be a problem.

There was another option. Bell had previously had his game Free Fall published by Acornsoft. They were a small publisher, but they might be interested.

"Braben and Bell had been working on something special, a 3D radar display."

They showed the game to David Johnson-Davies. He was reportedly astounded by the graphics and the sheer scale of the game and signed them up. The boys were given an advance of £1,000 each. Braben used some of his portion to buy a BBC Microcomputer.

In the summer of 1984 Bell and Braben had finished tweaking and refining their game and went back to Acornsoft telling them they were ready to release it. But Johnson-Davies had other plans. A game of this scale deserved something special.

He wanted the game to have a pilot's manual, a novella, a poster showing the in-game ships, a sheet summarising the detailed controls, and a postcard to enter a special competition.

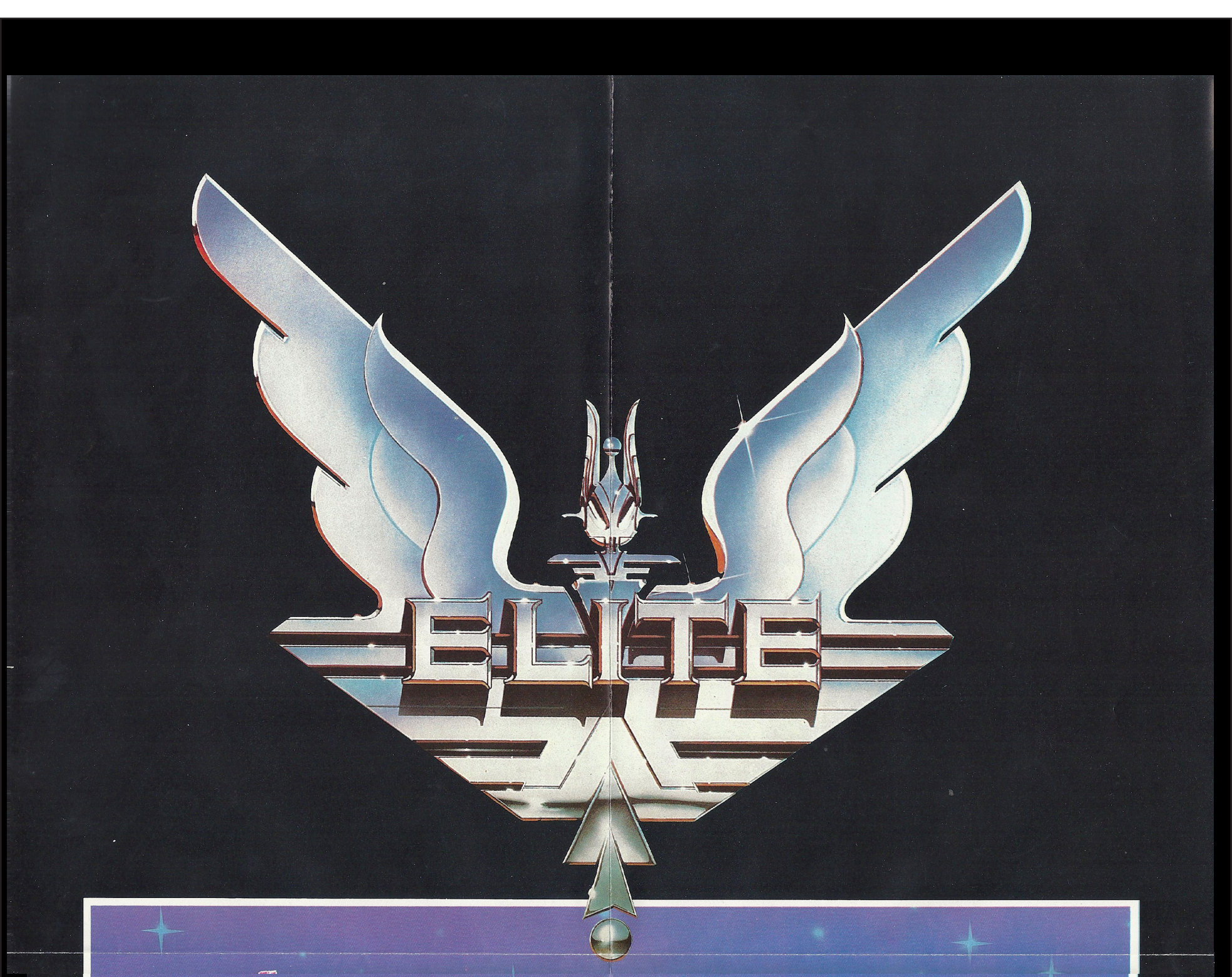
This deliberate delay allowed the inclusion of one more feature. Until now, Elite was destined to have a 2D radar display, but Braben and Bell had been working on something special, a 3D radar display. With a mere two weeks until the game went to press, the pair showed the new radar to Johnson-Davies. He agreed it should be in the game.

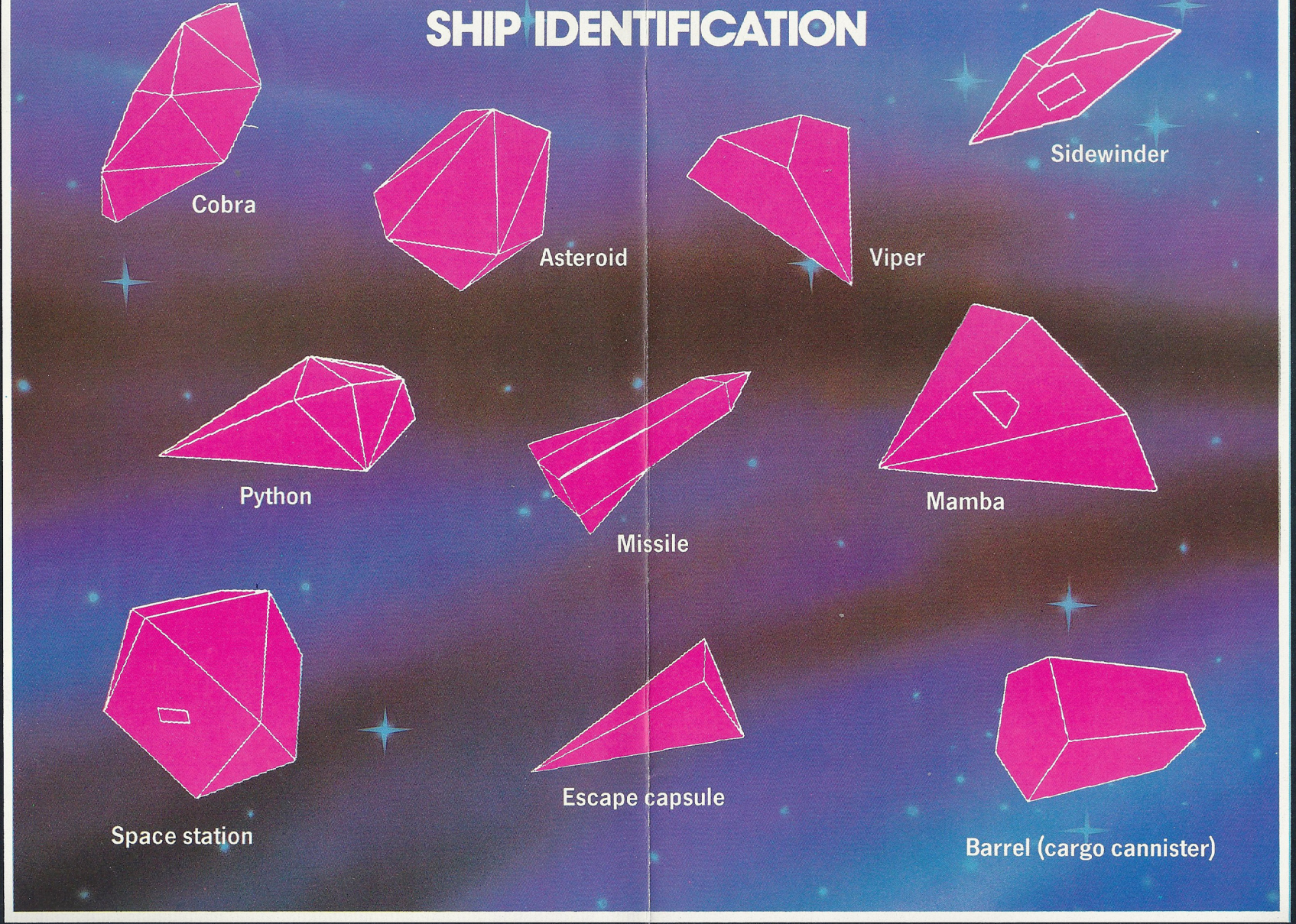
The September launch was going to be something spectacular in terms of a video games launch. Only a few years earlier, games were distributed in plastic bags with photocopied instructions. Here, Elite was presented in a box that could barely fit the contents, and it was to be launched at the Thorpe Park theme park that was hosting a tie-in ride for The Black Hole movie.

Elite immediately became a best seller soon after release. The higher price point didn't deter buyers who saw the value in the game and contents.

Legend has it that one copy was sold for every BBC Microcomputer that was sold. This may be a slight exaggeration as by the time Elite had sold 150,000 copies, the BBC Micro sales were close to 1.5 million, which is still impressive given the amount of BBC Micros that were in schools and not in homes.

Elite is often credited for advancing the video games industry in Britain. The inspiration of what could be achieved with so little must surely have had an impact on many future programmers.


ELITE



There were two different charts produced for the Acornsoft versions of Elite. This chart was from the Acorn Electron cassette version which did not have Thargoids in game due to memory constraints.

Chapter Two

ELITE

BBC Microcomputer

"...the first in a new generation of 3-D space games..."

1984, ELITE for the BBC Microcomputer game box

This BBC Model B Microcomputer from our collection has been signed by David Braben.

BBC MICRO ELITE

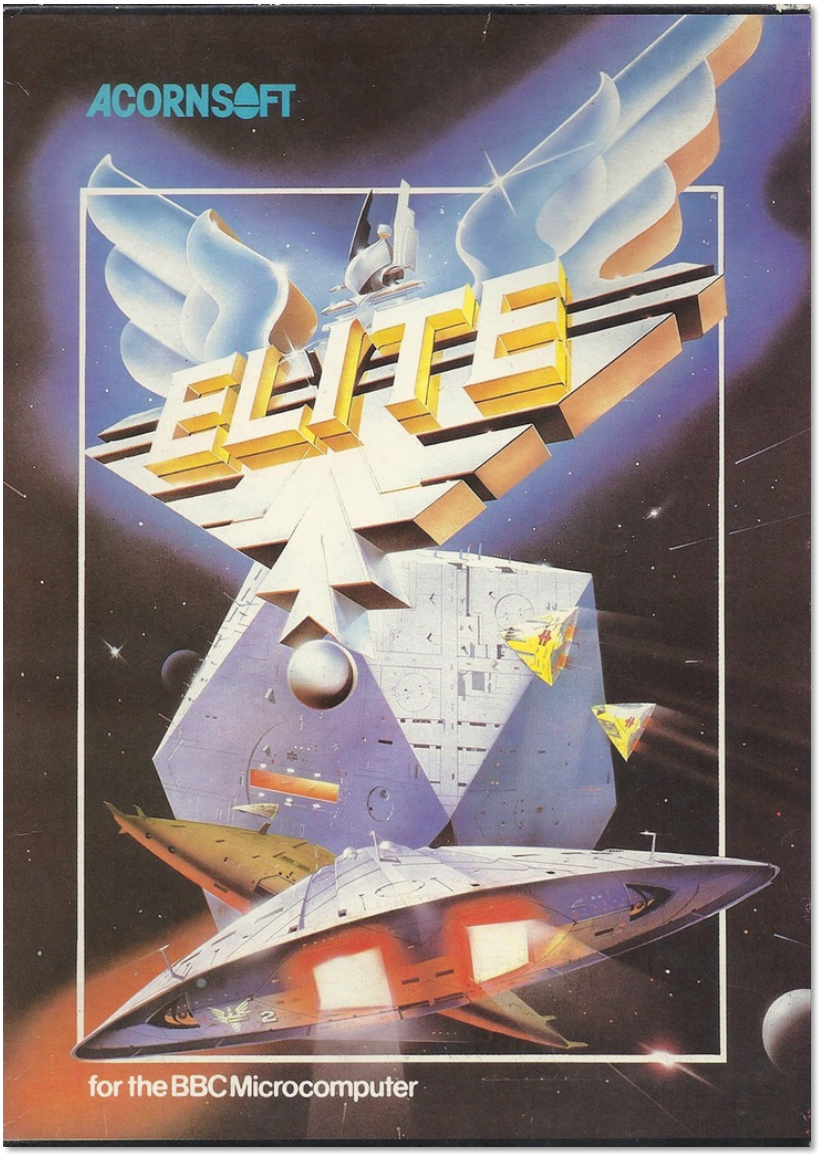
The BBC Microcomputer version of Elite, along with that of the Acorn Electron, were the very first versions of Elite to be released.

It came in an oversized box filled to the brim with all manner of game related material including a poster depicting space ships from the game, a novella to set the tone of the game, a manual written in the form of an in-game pilot's training manual, a function key guide overlay, a quick key guide, and a postcard to enter a competition to become one of the order of Elite!

A box of this nature was not commonplace in the early eighties. This was a time when most games came on a cassette tape and were packaged in a standard plastic cassette case with instructions printed on the inside of the label inlay. Many coders were copying their own games onto cassette and selling through magazines via mail order, or from stands at computer fairs. A computer game with this much content in the box was almost unheard of.

BBC Micro Elite was available on both cassette and on 5 1/4 inch floppy disks. The disk version afforded a larger storage capacity, and it was used to include a number of additional ships not available with the cassette version.

This trend of some versions featuring extra ships continued throughout the various releases dependant on game media storage capacity and the memory and performance of the computer upon which it was played.



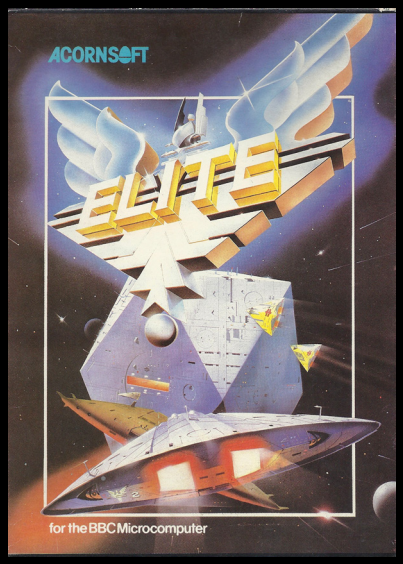
The BBC version of Elite released by Acornsoft featured stunning artwork by Philip Castle.

COMPUTER DATA

Model:	BBC Model B Microcomputer
Manufacturer:	Acorn Computers Ltd.
Year Released:	1981
CPU:	MOS 6502/6512
Clock:	2 MHz
Memory:	32 kB
Resolution:	640 x 256
Colours:	8 colours
Original Price:	£335

THE IMPOSSIBLE GAME

When I first booted up Elite on the BBC Micro I could not, literally, believe what I was seeing: a 3D rotating image (wireframe with hidden surface elimination) and an impossible mixture (BBC BASIC-wise) of graphics modes on a single screen. The impossibility of the game became even more obvious on playing: 8 galaxies to visit, each with 256 planets, each of which had an identity in terms of government, economy, tech level, population type and size, and a (sometimes hilarious) tourist blurb; and all somehow fitted into a machine with 32kB of free RAM (about the size of your average email).



"...here was a game of incredible depth..."

As if this technical marvel was not enough, it soon became apparent upon playing that here was a game of incredible depth that had completely broken away from the existing and limiting norm of 3 lives in 10 minutes. The synergy of trading and combat in an unbelievably large universe as a means to increase your game rating and to become more powerful weapon-wise was a stroke of genius. The fact that the game was truly open-ended (with a self-rewarding learning curve that quickly separated out those with short attention spans) was a game changer: its legacy is still felt today.

Add to this an inspired mapping of keyboard (no mouse then) to flight control, combat and trading, the genuine excitement of combat, and a game manual that broke the mould and you have a seminal landmark game.

I have played other ports of Elite, but the BBC original has left its mark. None of the future ports, with the notable exception of the Acorn Archimedes version, seems to me to capture the magic of the original. By any measure, BBC Elite is in the top 10 games that changed the genre. It was the first of its kind and it is still unique in being a truly open ended game with a flight model boasting a genuine 6 degrees of freedom. For program code the size of an email, this is truly, truly brilliant!

Reviewed by John Maltby

Load New Commander (Y/N)?

Yes please!

8 Galaxies, each with 256 planets, all squeezed into 32kB of RAM...

Each planet had an identity, and often a hilarious tourist blurb!

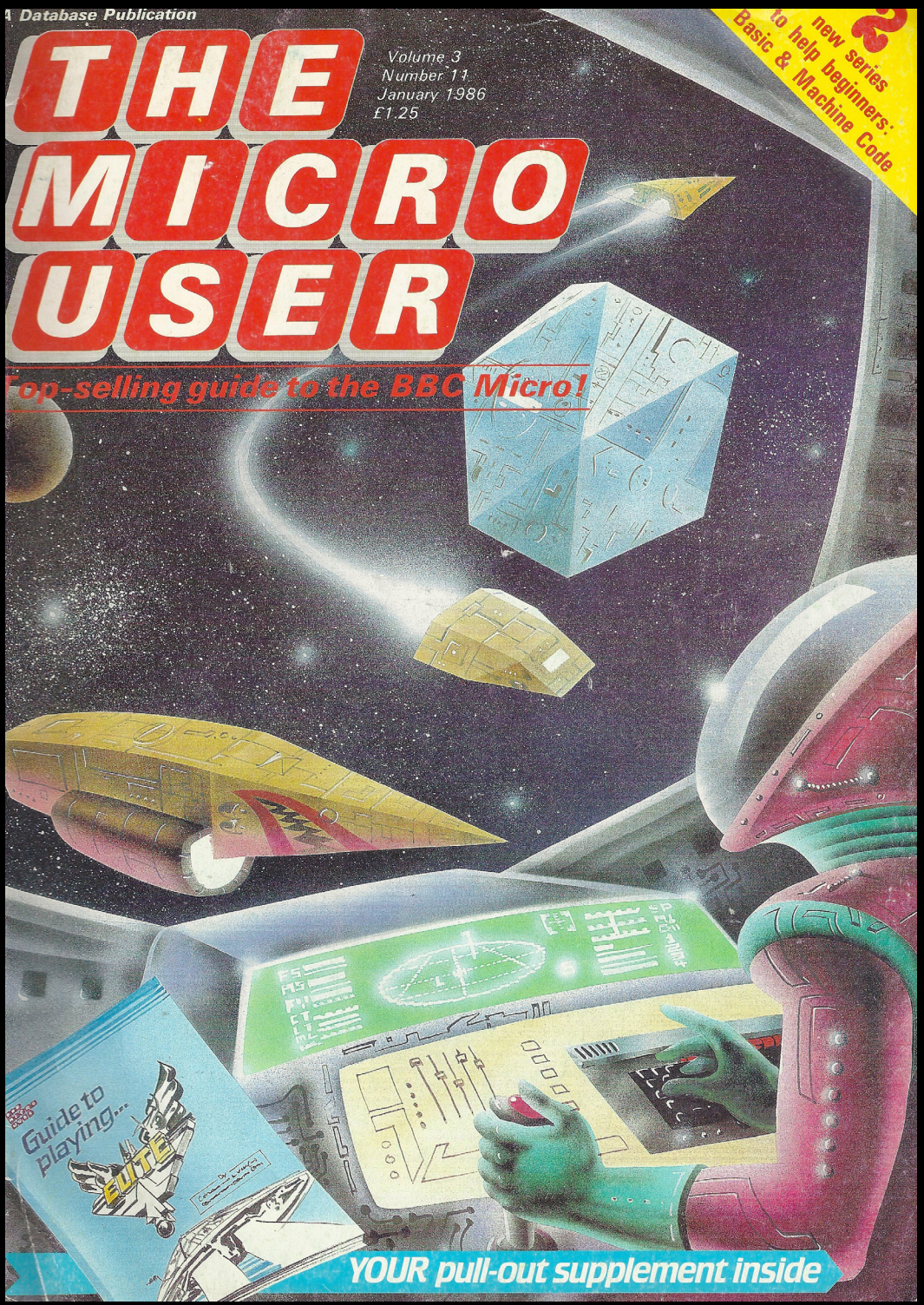
Why Gloria Slap likes de Lacy Super Thrust

'My boyfriend is a Viper Space Cop, and if you don't know what THAT means you're definitely not elite.'

Buy ELITE and find out more about Slap and Super Thrust

de Lacy Motors

This cross promotional advertisement featured in the in-game racing programme included with Acornsoft's REVS for the BBC Microcomputer by Goeff Crammond.



Elite appeared on the cover of many computer magazines during the mid-80s.

This cover is from the January 1986 issue of BBC Micro User, which was some fifteen months after Elite's initial release on the BBC Microcomputer.

BBC MICROCOMPUTER

CASSETTE VERSION

CONTENTS CHECKLIST:

- ☐ Game box
- ☐ Space Trader's Flight Training Manual
- ☐ The Dark Wheel novella
- ☐ Quick Key Control Guide
- ☐ Keyboard overlay
- ☐ Game cassette
- ☐ Ship Identification Chart
- ☐ Blue Order of Elite postcard
- ☐ BBC Model B loading instructions

BBC MICROCOMPUTER

DISK VERSION

CONTENTS CHECKLIST:

- ☐ Game box
- ☐ Space Trader's Flight Training Manual
- ☐ The Dark Wheel novella
- ☐ Quick Key Control Guide
- ☐ Keyboard overlay
- ☐ Game disk
- ☐ Ship Identification Chart
- ☐ Brown Order of Elite postcard
- ☐ Model B load instructions

BBC MICROCOMPUTER

MODELS B AND B+, BBC MASTER 128, and
6502 SECOND PROCESSOR. DISK VERSION

CONTENTS CHECKLIST:

- ☐ Game box
- ☐ Space Trader's Flight Training Manual
- ☐ The Dark Wheel novella
- ☐ Quick Key Control Guide
- ☐ Keyboard overlay
- ☐ Game disk
- ☐ Ship Identification Chart
- ☐ Model B and B+, loading instructions
- ☐ Master 128 loading instructions
- ☐ 6502 second processor loading instructions

Will you be the first Earthling to win a pla

Acornsoft are issuing a nationwide challenge to all Acorn Electron and BBC Micro users.

It's the challenge to join a new and exclusive group of computer games players: The Elite.

With 3-dimensional graphics, Elite is a game which is light years ahead of any other.

It strictly defines the rank of each and every player.

As your prowess improves, you move into higher ranks.

But make no mistake, to reach the top rank, your performance must become exceptional.

Then, and only then, will you qualify to call yourself a member of The Elite.

From harmless, you must become lethal.

In Elite, all players start as equals.

With the initial rank of "Harmless," you will embark upon an experience unlike any that you have known before.

You will be a space trader who roams the universe, making your living from buying and selling the cargo in your Cobra space craft.

On your travels, you will encounter aggressors who are eager to put an end to your dealings.

Only the fittest will survive.

As you establish yourself as a survivor, you will win the right to a higher rank.

In all, there are nine, from "Harmless" to "Elite." And your computer will continually tell you where you stand.

Trade with 2,000 planets in eight galaxies.

Besides survival, your success also depends on the rewards you reap from the cargo that you carry.

ce among the Elite?

That cargo can be anything from foodstuffs to contraband. If you decide to trade in contraband, the rewards will certainly be higher. But so will the risks you take.

To ply your trade, you can dock at any of 2,000 planets in eight galaxies.

However, before you dock, you must use your wits to assess the planet's political climate and the perils which may be waiting for you.

Also, in any of the eight galaxies, you may find yourself being asked to perform acts of considerable heroism and selfless courage.

Although these will bring you into danger, they can bring considerable rewards too.

We're waiting to recognize your skills.

Achieving higher status in Elite will tax your skills to the limit. Which is why you must download your game onto cassette or disc each time you take a break from play.

When you reach the rank of "Competent" or higher, you should send us the secret code number revealed to you by your computer.

We will send you in return a special document which certifies your achievement. And you stand to win a valuable prize.

Are you ready to accept the challenge?

Elite is available on both disc and cassette for the BBC Micro and on cassette for the Acorn Electron.

With either, you will get "Elite: The Dark Wheel," a compelling novel which sets the whole mood of your adventure. You'll also get a flight training manual which will get you fit to roar into the unknown in your Cobra spacecraft.

Your Acornsoft dealer now has the entire package at £14.95 on cassette, or £17.65 on disc (for the BBC Micro) and £12.95 for the Electron.

Credit card holders can simply telephone 0933 79300 during office hours.

Alternatively, you can order by post from: Acornsoft, c/o Vector Marketing, Denington Estate, Wellingborough, Northants NN8 2RL.

You can also get a free Elite poster by ringing 0933 79300.

ACORNSOFT

Chapter Three

ELITE

Acorn Electron

"Electron ELITE features superb high resolution black and white graphics"

1985, ELITE game box by Acornsoft

The Acorn Electron joined the BBC Microcomputer as launch platforms for a new 3D space trading and combat game.

ACORN ELECTRON ELITE

The Electron version of Elite was for the most part a faithful reproduction of the flagship BBC disk version of Elite. The Electron version was missing a number of features and ships that were found in the BBC disk version, and was even missing a few that were still present in the BBC cassette version.

Unlike the BBC Micro, the Electron version did not utilise a split graphics mode display. This meant that both the console and main view were presented in black and white.

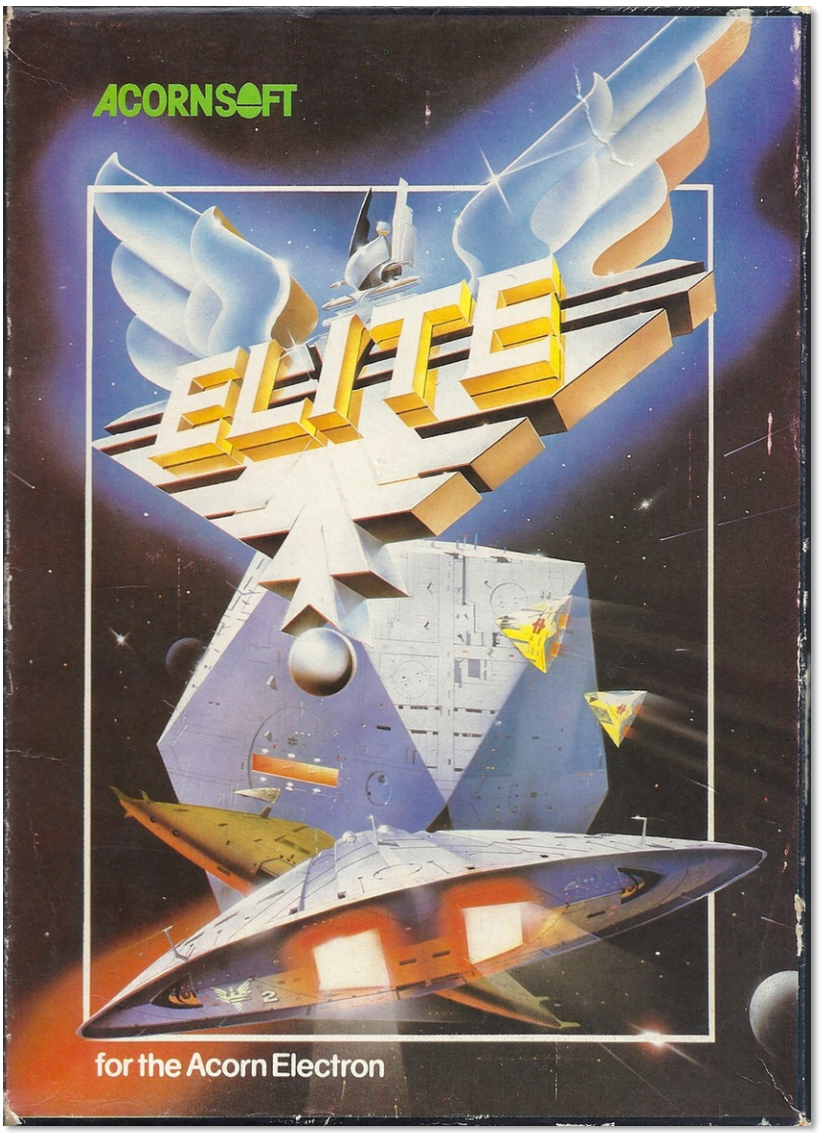
The Electron had far less ships compared to the BBC disk version, and one ship less than the BBC cassette version. The manual's Guide to Ships in Service only detailed the Cobra Mk III, Mamba, Python, Viper and Sidewinder.

The ship identification chart was unique to this version in that it omitted the Thargoids as they were not present in this version of the game.

Another missing feature that wouldn't go unnoticed was the lack of suns. The player could still buy fuel scoops for their Cobra Mk II, but without suns in game the scoops were only useful for collecting cargo.

None of the missions that were coded in the BBC disk release were included in the Electron version.

Despite these limitations, the Electron version was still very popular with Electron owners.



The Acorn Elite box featured "Acornsoft" printed in green rather than the blue used for the BBC Microcomputer verions

COMPUTER DATA

Model:	Acorn Electron
Manufacturer:	Acorn Computers Ltd.
Year Released:	1982
CPU:	MOS 6502A
Clock:	2 MHz
Memory:	32 kB
Resolution:	640 x 256
Colours:	2 colours
Original Price:	£175

Acornsoft launches new cult adventure

ACORNSOFT has launched a pre-Christmas blitz on Electron users with 20 new titles backed by a £150,000 promotional campaign.

And it is predicting it will enjoy a bumper Christmas with anticipated sales of around £2.5 million – more than double those for the same period last year.

It bases this forecast on the fact that its recent releases will boost its total of programs available for the Electron and BBC Micro to 120.

The company's latest offerings include four for the growing home education market which, according to Acornsoft, "take computer learning back to first principles".

Cocktails

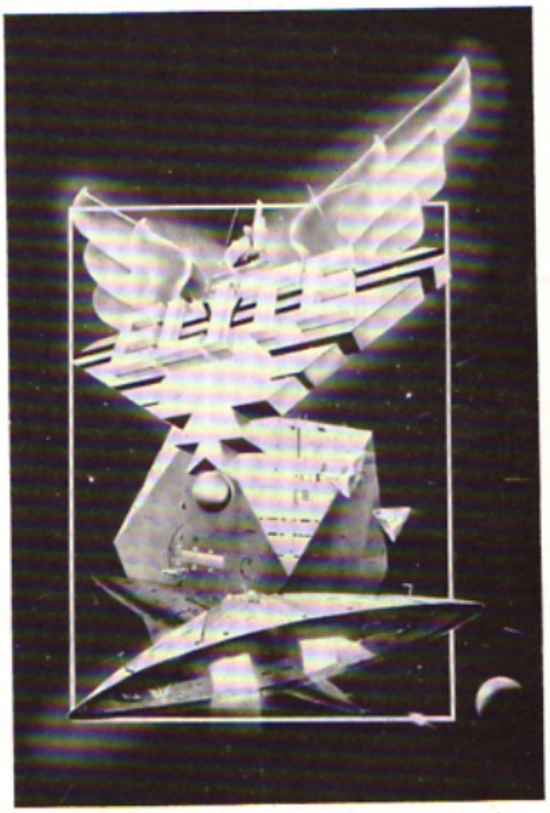
The software publisher has also zeroed in on the non-hobbyist adult user, with home interest subjects ranging from how to make cocktails to a "sympathetic" weight-watchers program.

However Acornsoft expects its real Christmas sales bonanza to come from Elite, which it is touting as the new cult game for the festive season.

This integrates 3D spaceflight simulation within a non-stop galactic adventure.

It places Electron and BBC Micro users in command of a Cobra space ship on what the promotional material describes as: "A fantastic voyage of discovery and adventure, representing the ultimate test of a human's flying, combat, navigational and entrepreneurial skills".

Intergalactic trading between countless planets exposes players to danger from pirates and, should profitable contraband be carried, from police ships as well.



Acornsoft's Elite . . . 3D space flight simulation in a galactic adventure

Coveted

The profits gained, however, buy better defences, which help the traders survive another day and, eventually, win the coveted rank of Elite.

Acornsoft believes Elite represents the state of the art in home computer entertainment taxing a player's skills both of coordination and intellect.

Elite took two years to develop in association with Cambridge undergraduates Ian Bell and David Braben.

Priced at £12.95, the package includes a 64 page space traders flight training manual, a space ship identification chart, command reference card and function key strip, and to set the scene, a science fiction novella based on the game entitled The Dark Wheel.

Acorn Elite article from Electron User (November 1984)

Acornsoft: The Dark Wheel

The Dark Wheel, an Elite novella by Robert Holdstock, was included in the Acornsoft boxed sets for both releases of the Acorn Electron version of Elite.

The original version was printed on glossy paper and had "The Dark Wheel Holdstock Acornsoft" printed along the right most edge of the back cover. It is consistent with a book that would have a spine, unlike this novella that was simply stapled and folded.

The Dark Wheel novella included in the updated release was printed on matte paper and omitted the pseudo-spine text. Both had the classic cover by Philip Castle.

Both versions also had the promise of a sequel to the Dark Wheel novella planned for release in 1985. This of course never eventuated. The stock code number SBG38/B3 remained unchanged between versions.

Superior Software Releases

Superior Software released the rebadged Acorn Electron version in 1986. The Superior Software releases were not typically superior in terms of the extras included in the box.

Unlike the Acornsoft releases, Superior Software omitted a number of elements including the Dark Wheel novella, ship identification poster, loading instruction sheet and the separate key guide.

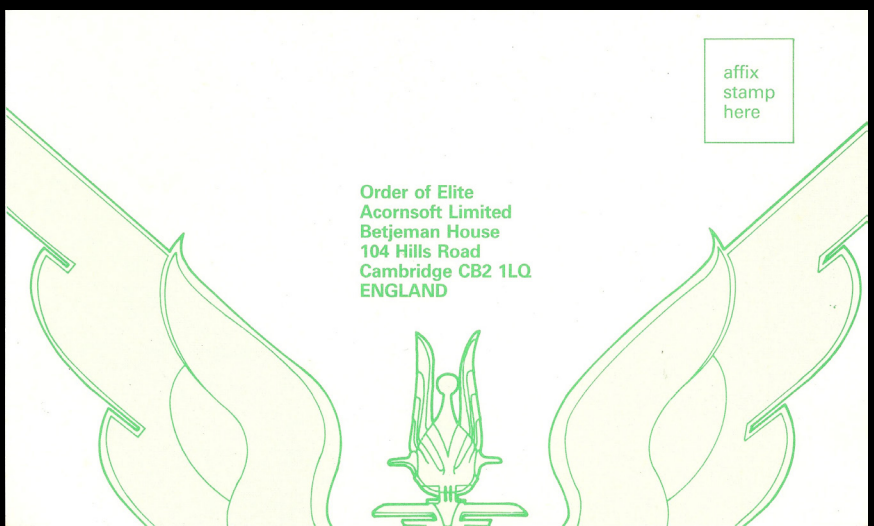
Superior included some items like loading instructions and the key guide as part of the Flight Training Manual, but the ship identification poster and the Dark Wheel novella were nowhere to be seen.

The Order of Elite Postcard

The Acornsoft version included an invitation for UK Commanders who had reached Competent or higher to apply for membership of the Order of Elite by returning a postcard included with the boxed game.

The offer was also in BBC cassette and BBC disk versions, though the colour of the text was different on all three. The BBC cassette version had blue text, the BBC disk version had brown text, and the Acorn Electron version had green text.

It is not clear whether the updated Electron release included the postcard, as the offer ended in March 1985.



Right: The Order of Elite postcard included with the Electron version featured green printing.

BUGS IN GALACTIC HYPERSPACE

AND THE ACORN ELECTRON'S BATTLE AGAINST THE BEEB

The Acorn Electron version was of the few versions to be released only on cassette and the limitations of the format tainted many people's view of Electron Elite.

To make matters worse, the initial release was delivered with a nasty software bug that prevented the Galactic Hyperspace function from working.

For some this was just another problem in a growing list of deficiencies when Electron Elite was compared to the flagship BBC Microcomputer version.

Elite warning

A GRIM warning to future buyers of Elite for the Electron who have seen it on the BBC Micro and read the reviews.

It is not quite the same on the Electron.

I found that after saving my credits, where I bought my Galactic Hyperdrive, I could not use it.

There is no colour, less enemy ships and it's drastic flashing.

Acornsoft's spokesperson said: "There are no plans at the moment to debug the program as the faults do not interfere with the playing of the game".

– D. Fiveash, Tolworth, Surrey.

Some Electron Elite players were not happy with the Electron version!

(Electron User Micro Messages, February 1985)

To be fair, the Acorn Electron never really stood a chance of living up to its big brother's version of Elite. With no disk version and the extra capacity to add more ships and features that came with the extra storage capacity, the Electron was bound to be found wanting. And that was before one even brought hardware differences into the fray.

The one edge that the Electron had in the battle was price. The Acorn Electron computer was available for only £175 compared to the Beeb's far more expensive £399 price tag, which had rapidly increased from its slightly more affordable launch price of £335. But for Beeb owners, one still needed to have a disk drive and a DFS ROM to enable the drive to be used.

Price was a big factor, and it wasn't just the hardware space.

£12.95 would land you the Acorn Electron version of Elite, whereas Beeb prices were £14.95 for the cassette version and £17.65 for the disk version.

But back to the hyperspace bug...

A few users came up with some innovated ways to get around the galactic hyperspace bug, and before long Acornsoft ran a mail-in offer to replace the initial batch of faulty cassettes. Some online sources advise that the replacement cassette was marked as V1.1.

Acornsoft corrected the problem for the second release, which can be identified by the "V2" appended to the cassette title. The stock code number on the cassette remained unchanged as SLG38/C.

Did you know?

Superior Software released a third version for the Acorn Electron in 1986 that relabeled the cassette to include the Superior Software name. This version is the only one with a single sided label. The other two releases have labels on both sides of the cassette.

DON'T GIVE UP – IT WORKS!

I'VE finally worked out how to get the Galactic Hyperspace in Elite to work!

Press F6 (local chart) and make sure the cursor is positioned at the planet you are presently at.

After that, press the buttons Caps Lk Func, Ctrl and H simultaneously and very quickly.

Keep pressing the buttons rapidly until the message "Galactic Hyperspace" appears. You may get times when you think it's not going to work and your fingers are killing you – but don't give up, it will work eventually.

If this ever happens, and it usually does, it helps to change the screen or view after a few rapid bursts of pressing the buttons.

That is – after pressing F6 (local chart) press the buttons very quickly about 20 times and if it still doesn't work press F4 (right view) and press buttons again.

If still no response, change view once again and press buttons.

Like I said before, don't give up – it will work.

One more thing. Don't worry if the message "Hyperspace range" comes up. It always does – so just keep on hitting those keys. – **Colin Harris, Stoke Newington.**

This letter from Electron User (June 1985) offers a solution to the Electron Elite's infamous Galactic Hyperspace issue.

Acornsoft Game Boxes

At first glance the boxes for the two different Acorn releases look identical, and the front of the boxes are. The back of the box has a slight change between versions wherein the second version has additional text added hailing the Electron's "superb high resolution black and white graphics".

Did you know?

The Acorn Electron version of Elite cannot be used with a joystick. All controls must be entered using the keyboard.

Acornsoft Electron Reference Card

The Acornsoft releases all included a neat reference card that provided an at-hand ship identification chart and inside a summary of the controls used on the Electron.

The Electron version only had five different ships in the game, including the Cobra Mk III piloted by the player, along with five other space objects.

These ships and other objects are the only ones shown on the Electron-specific colour ship identification poster.

Cheats!

Electron User published a three page cheat program in the November 1988 issue that allowed Electron Commanders to create their own specification Cobra Mk III with any lasers and equipment available in-game.

Below: At one point it was feared that Acornsoft had abandoned the Electron Elite version...

Did you know?

Many Commanders may well have been lost in battle as they frantically searched for the 'TAB' key on their Mark I Electron Input Device… The Electron version used the '=' key to deploy the Energy Bomb, unlike the BBC which used 'TAB'. This is one of the typos that were corrected in the second release manual.

Fast Facts

Version:	Acorn Electron
Publisher:	Acornsoft
Format:	Cassette
Price:	£9.95
Barcode:	Nil
CAT:	SLG38

Elite not being dropped

RUMOURS that Acornsoft had abandoned the Electron version of the best selling cult game Elite have been strongly denied.

Several dealers and other members of the computer trade had contacted *Electron User* to say that they were unable to obtain Electron versions of the game in the run-up to Christmas.

But Acornsoft's marketing manager, Jeremy Preston, says the dried up supply pipeline was only a temporary hiccup.

"It is true that Electron versions of Elite were out of stock for a while", he told *Electron User*. "But we reordered in time to get a significant number of copies on to the marketplace before Christmas, although we were not able to supply every dealer.

"However we are again reprinting and there should be no shortage of Elite for the Electron in the forseeable future".

Electron Elite opens the game to a wider audience

The Acorn Electron is easy to dismiss as a cut-down version of the BBC Model B, and the Electron version of Elite likewise.

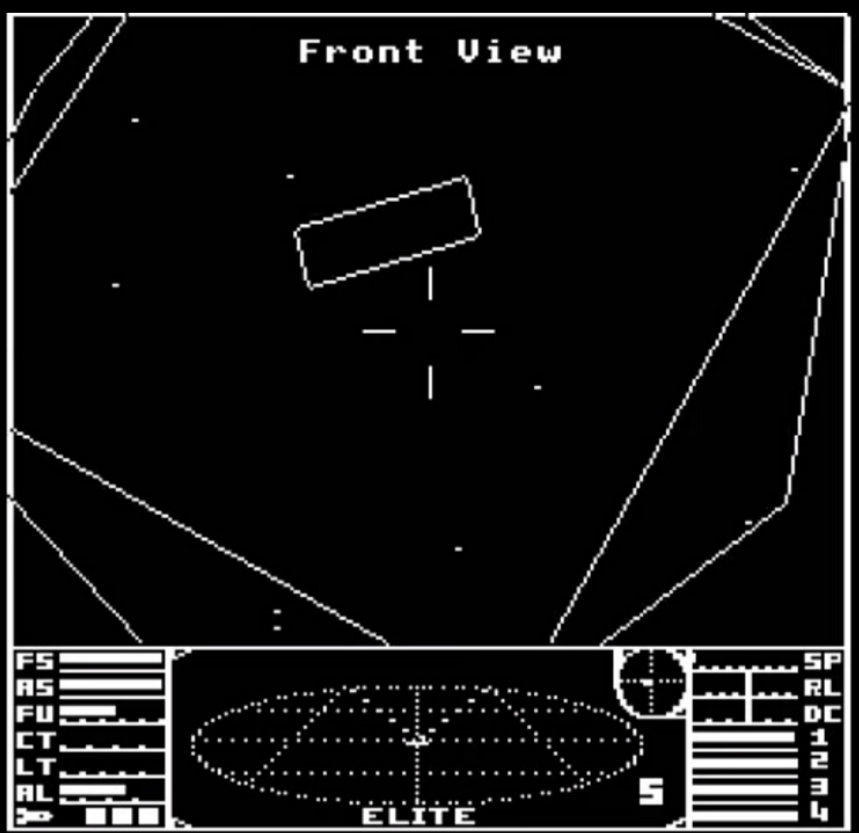
You could focus on the absences: fewer ship types, no Thargoids, no suns and no colour. But this would be to understate the significance of both the computer and the game.

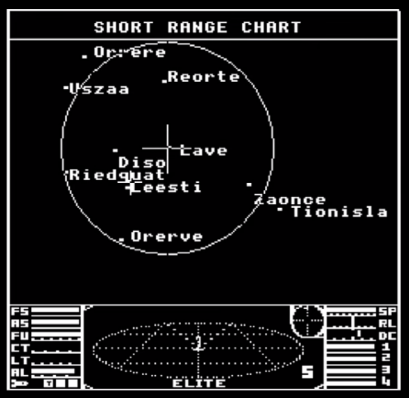
Releasing Elite on the Electron therefore played an important part in opening up the game to a wider audience.

The Elite package was intact, including the Dark Wheel novella that had to be read before loading the game for the first time; and the keyboard overlay, that sorely missed proof of a game's ambition. The most remarkable part of the package, though, was the cassette, and the very fact of its existence, which heralded undreamed of levels of performance.

"...not just a new game, but a new genre, and everything was fresh and unexpected."

The Electron was the option you took if you were serious about both programming and playing games, and you were in a budget conscious family that had succumbed to pre-teen pestering.





After recovery from the initial astonishment, the revelation was that Elite was not just a new game, but a new genre, and everything was fresh and unexpected. There were no tropes, no archetypes, no points of reference from the world of games.

The shocking difficulty of docking; the victories in combat, dogfighting like you'd only seen in films; the eking out of profit; all were experienced ex nihilo, like a Lumière audience watching a train arrive.

And it was this exploration of a newborn genre, mirroring the exploration of the galaxy, that drove the player on, through hours and days, progressing up the ranks.

The Electron version was proof that developers could harness the power of even the most unpromising platform, and in doing so it unlocked the imaginations of the first true generation of gamers as they strived to become elite.

Reviewed by Gareth Rowlands (aka Cmdr Grondane)

ACORN ELECTRON

CONTENTS CHECKLIST:

- ☐ Acorn Electron Elite game box*
- ☐ Space Trader's Flight Training Manual
- ☐ The Dark Wheel novella
- ☐ Quick Key Control Guide
- ☐ Acorn Electron game cassette*
- ☐ Ship Identification Chart
- ☐ Green Order of Elite postcard
- ☐ Acorn Electron keyboard overlay
- ☐ Acorn Electron loading instructions

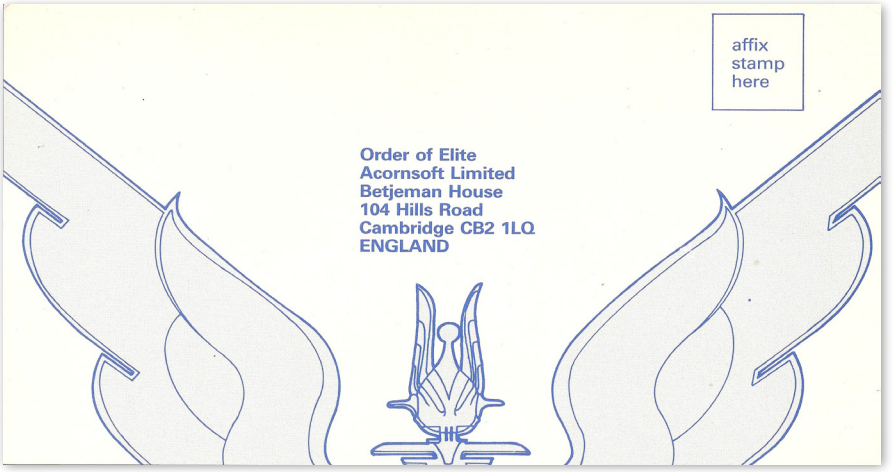
*The updated version has additional text on the back of the game box as well as a V2 designator on the game cassette

Chapter Four

Order of ELITE

"Only a chosen few have ever achieved this honoured status"

1985, the Order of Elite Membership post card



The blue Order of Elite Membership post card was from the Acornsoft BBC Microcomputer cassette version.

Postcards

One of the many items included inside the bulging ELITE boxes stirred up excitement amongst those who bought original copies of ELITE for the BBC micro and Acorn Electron. It was a post card, but not just any ordinary post card. This one was pre-addressed to the Order of Elite.

The post card began “To apply for membership of the Order of Elite, intergalactic space traders (Cobra class) who have reached the rank of “competent” or higher should submit this postcard with their current credit holding, rating and the Intergalactic Bank security code. Every month until March 1985 the trader who, in the opinion of the Order, has submitted the entry with the greatest skill, will be invited to become a member of the Order and will win an “Elite” emblem and £100 of Acornsoft software.”

Further on the postcard read: “The six qualifying traders will be invited to take part in the national Elite tournament in April 1985.”

Each version of the game included a different coloured postcard. The BBC cassette version had blue, the BBC disc had brown and the Acorn Electron had green.

Above right: Elite Championship article from Electron User (July 1985)

Right: Elite article from Electron User (July 1985)

Paul, 17, collects the Elite £1,000

A SCHOOLBOY took time off from studying for his A levels to become the world champion Elite player recently.

Paul Shonk, 17, the son of a Croydon sales executive, snatched the title in the face of fierce competition during the Electron & BBC Micro User Show.

The youngster, who had practised the cult space game for seven hours a week before the build up to his exams, carried off a £1,000 prize.

Twelve finalists converged on the New Horticultural Hall to display their skills during the marathon two-day play off.

Each had previously won eliminating heats organised by Acornsoft since the company launched Elite in September, 1984.

The finalists were:

Dave Brunner, a computer studies teacher from Romford, Essex.

Joseph Buchdahl, a 14-year-old schoolboy from Horningsea, Cambridge, who much prefers history and biology to computing.

Philip Carson, aged 18 and studying physics, maths and electronic engineering at Surbiton School, Surrey.

David Duckworth, a 19-year-old who sells cleaners on a market stall in his home town of Preston, Lancashire.

Mathew Huddleston, a 14-year-old student at Kings Manor, Shoreham, who can be found playing the theatre organ – or Elite – when not studying for his O levels.

Mike Keeting, a biology teacher from Leeds who ran afoul of domestic problems for playing Elite seven hours a day when it first came out.

Brett Keys, a 30-year-old electronics technician who writes accounts software packages in his spare time.

Andrew Myers, a 16-year-old rugby enthusiast who is about to take O levels at Whitchurch.

Darren Rowley, aged 19 and an employee of a food company in Rugby.

Kemal Sangrar, 15 a student at Our Lady's High School, Cumbernauld, Glasgow.

Andrew Vickery, a 17-year-old British Telecom apprentice engineer and self confessed Elite-aholic who plays up to four hours a night.

"The competition was really hot and I'm just very pleased to have emerged the winner", said Paul Shonk.

He's already decided what to do with the prize money. He is going to buy a BBC B+ and a bigger disc drive.

ELITE CHAMPIONSHIPS FOR THE BIG SHOW

THE National Elite Championships are to be a major attraction at the first of this year's Electron & BBC Micro User Shows.

Six finalists, from an entry of 5,000, have the chance of winning equipment and software to the value of £1,000.

Forming the last stage of the competition – the world's first championship for the best-selling "cult" space game – is a two-day Elite-athlon to be held at the Show on the Saturday and Sunday.

Finalists will be called on to play a new, second processor version of the all-colour game now with faster graphics. It will be the first public showing of this version.

Elite has sold more than 100,000 copies since its launch.

Its success has prompted Acornsoft to sign a licensing agreement for Commodore and Spectrum versions.

"Naturally we are very pleased they have chosen our show as the venue for the final", says Derek Meakin, head of Database, the show's organisers.

"It will certainly be a major attraction at an event which will once again prove to be the launching pad for all that's new in the world of the Electron".

Playing the game

FOR the first two days of the Electron & BBC Micro User Show the Elite stand will be open to the general public. Visitors will get the chance to see and play the sophisticated 6502 second processor version of the top selling game.

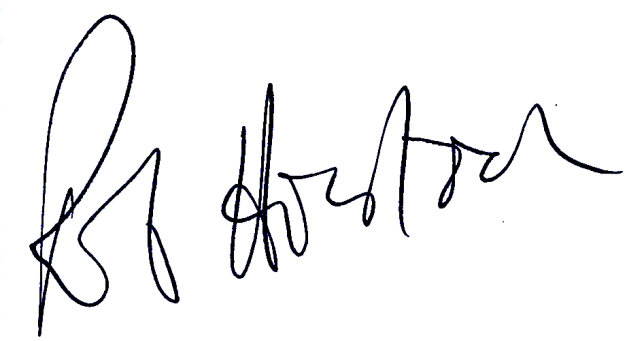
The stand will be open all day Thursday May 9 and Friday May 10 and also on Saturday May 11 after the first Elite-athlon session finishes at 3pm.

Chapter Five

The Dark Wheel

"Remember: Raxxla!"

1985, The Dark Wheel



Robert Holdstock's signature as it appears in our first edition copy of "Eye Among the Blind".

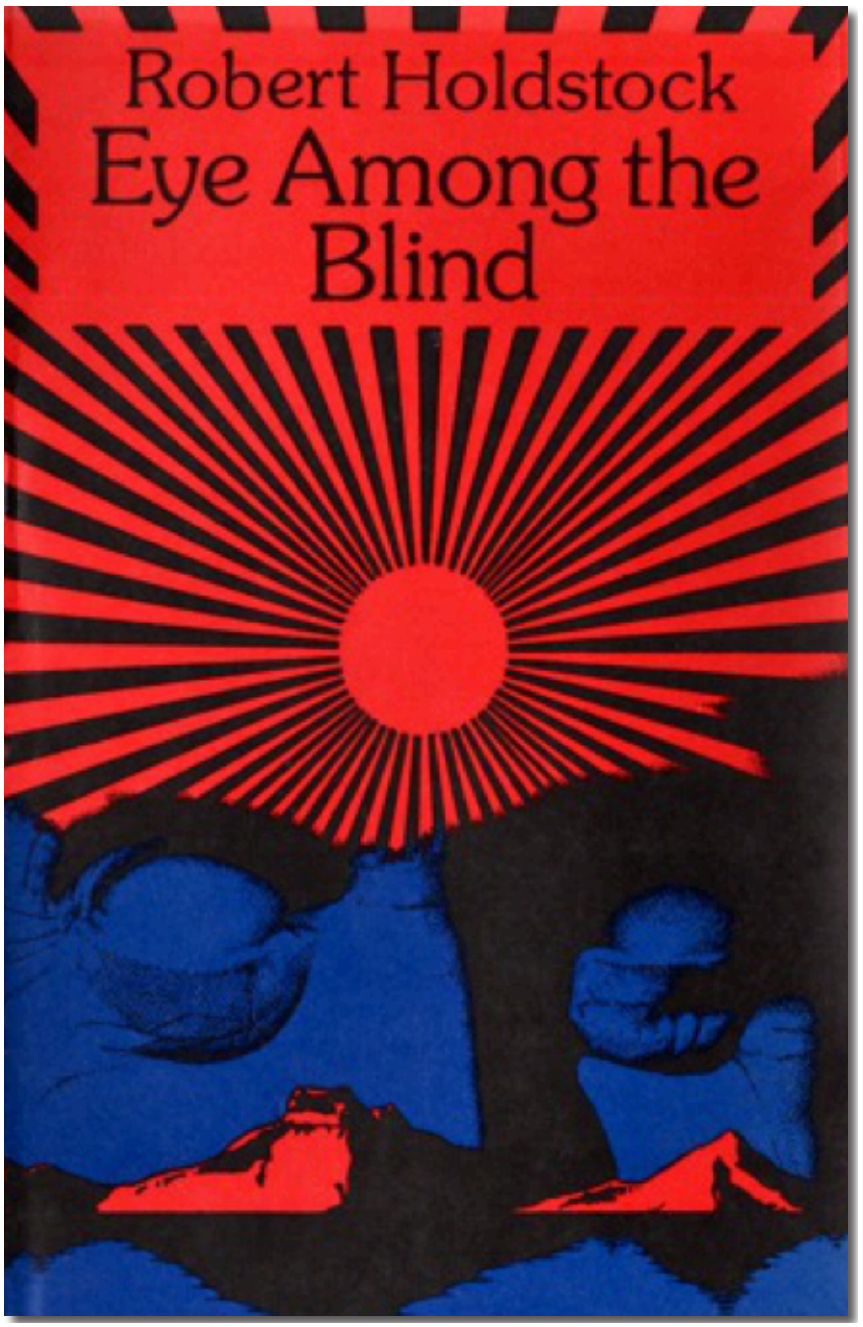
Born on 2 August 1948 in Hythe, Kent, Robert was the oldest of five children. He attended Gillingham Grammar School in the Medway Towns at age seven.

During 1967 to 1970 he attended University College of North Wales where he earned a Bachelor of Science with honours in Applied Zoology. In 1971 he earned a Master of Science in Medical Zoology from the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine.

Robert began part time writing while he was conducting research at the Medical Research Council in London from 1971 to 1974.

He became a full time writer during 1976, the year in which his first novel, the science fiction story Eye Among the Blind, was also published.

On the 18th of November 2009 Robert collapsed due to an E.coli infection. He passed away in hospital on the 29th of November 2009.



Having a large selection of both fantasy and science fiction short stories and novels published between 1969 up until he passed away in 2009, Robert also wrote The Dark Wheel that was published in 1985. The 48-page novella was included in the game box for all Acornsoft and most Firebird versions of ELITE.

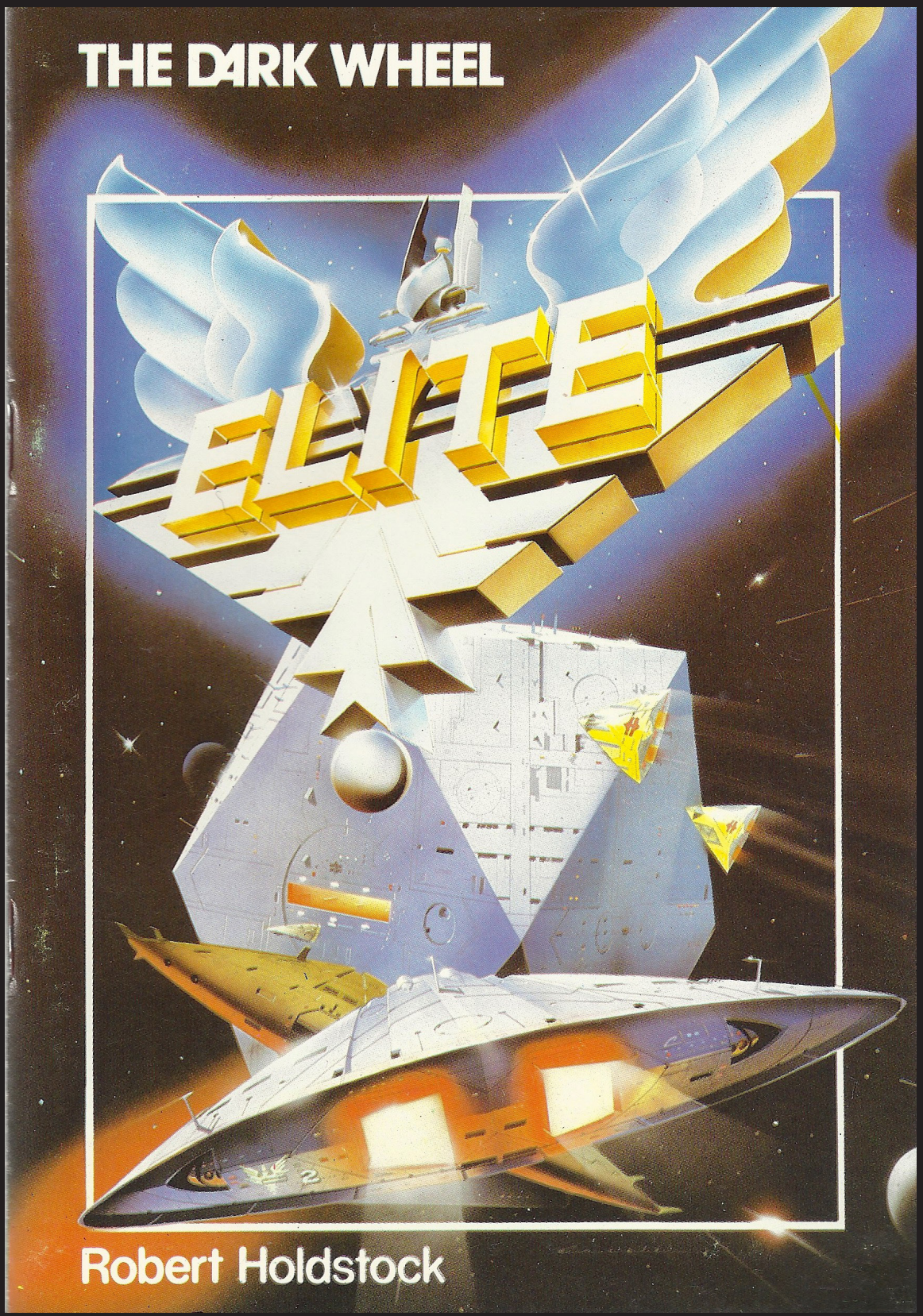
The Dark Wheel holds the esteemed privilege of being the first novella to be included with a computer game.

Acornsoft's Managing Director, David Johnson-Davies, commissioned Robert Holdstock to write the novella that would accompany the game.

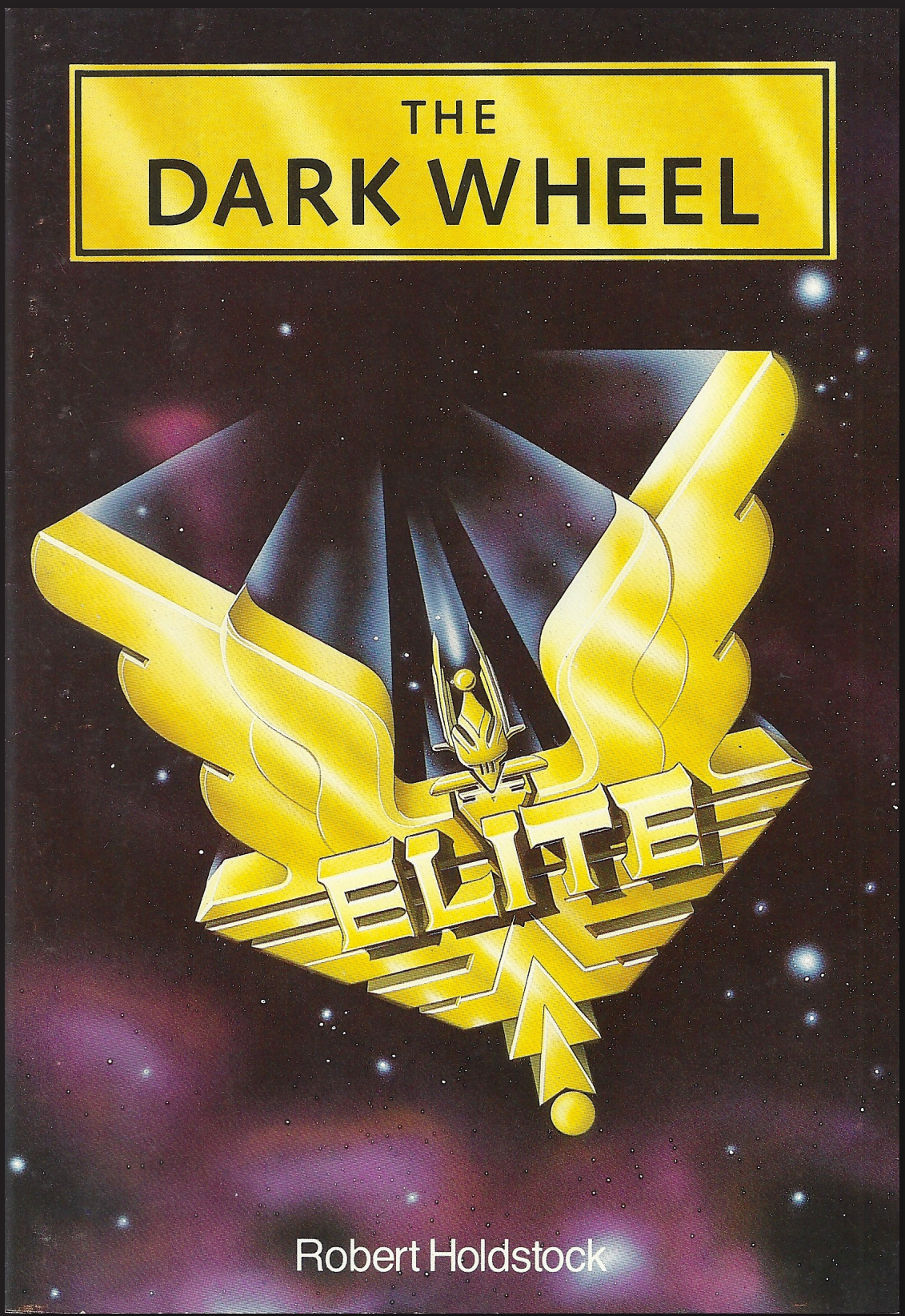
The original Acornsoft version cover art was done by Philip Castle whose airbrushed art was also used for the iconic movie poster from The Clockwork Orange and the poster from Paul McCartney's Wings tour. The artwork was also used for the Superior Software and Hybrid Technology releases of Elite.

An updated cover was used on The Dark Wheel for the Firebird releases. This version featured Firebird's new stylised ELITE logo set against a starfield background.

In a 2002 CVG article, David Braben is quoted as saying, "I think the story was important at the outset. Establishing the world of Elite, and showing how radical the game was at the time..."



Philip Castle created the original iconic Acornsoft coverart for The Dark Wheel.



The cover of The Dark Wheel was updated for the Firebird release.

Chapter Six

The Firebird Years

"Those in the know reckon it's a six-figure sum!"

on the sale of Elite's publishing rights, May 1985, Zzap! 64

The familiar Firebird logo adorned numerous versions of ELITE that were published by Firebird from 1985.

Telecomsoft, the software division of British Telecom, was founded in 1984 and rapidly set up a number of software labels used to enter the computer games market. The first of these was Firebird.

Firebird was originally split into two labels. Firebird Silver released budget priced titles at the £2.50 price point, and the premium label, Firebird Gold, initially released higher quality titles at the £5.95 price point.

Firebird Gold released a number of successful 8-bit titles including Revs, The Sentinel, Druid and Elite.

The man given the task to run Firebird Software in the long term was James Scoular, who had worked at VNU Publications. Amongst other titles, VNU published Personal Computer World magazine and James had only recently been promoted to Publisher when he resigned and joined TelecomSoft.

Soon after James arrived, he began to assemble his own team to move TelecomSoft to the next phase. The next phase depended upon Firebird out-bidding rival publishers to the conversion rights of one particular game, called Elite.

Elite for the BBC Micro was a landmark title because of its open-ended design and 3D wireframe graphics. The co-authors – Ian Bell and David Braben – initiated a UK games industry frenzy when agent Jacqui Lyons at Marjacq announced that the rights to publish the Z80 conversions of Elite would be auctioned, in September 1984.

TelecomSoft saw Elite as their chance to become a big player, and a sealed bid of £100,000 was submitted. Rumour has it that this was three or four times larger than the next nearest bid. Inevitably they won, but there's some mystery around the auction and the outcomes that meant TelecomSoft had costly additional negotiations with Acornsoft to use the name 'Elite' and to be able to reproduce some of the documentation that accompanied the original BBC version, including the novella by Robert Holdstock, called "The Dark Wheel".

The original programmers wrote the Commodore 64 version of Elite, but they had no experience coding for that machine and required a little help to get started.

"TelecomSoft saw Elite as their chance to become a big player..."

This came in the form of programmers Jez San and Fouad Katan, who had begun creating what was later called PDS (Programmer's Development System). This tool quickly became used throughout the industry for cross-platform development, and it evolved over the next four to five years.

Ian Bell and David Braben used code created for PDS to get Elite working quickly. As a result, Firebird was able to demonstrate an early version for the Commodore 64 at the February 1985 LET Show in London, just weeks after they had acquired the rights. The sight of the Commodore 64 on the stand being discretely connected to a BBC Micro running PDS did confuse a few onlookers at the time!

The 16-bit rights to publish Elite were negotiated in 1986, with a CGA IBM PC version – courtesy of Realtime Games – appearing soon afterwards. However, it was a couple more years before Elite was available for the Atari ST and Commodore Amiga.

Sadly, James Scoular didn't get to see any of the success that Elite ultimately brought to TelecomSoft. Shortly after work had begun on the Commodore 64 conversion, James was taken to hospital with a coronary. He never came out and died 3 weeks later. Everyone at Firebird was stunned. James was only 27, and a fitness fanatic who would get up early to go rowing on the Thames before work.

Herbert Wright had only recently joined TelecomSoft on James Scoular's invitation, having been a colleague of his at VNU Publications. Herbert project managed the Elite conversions and some other Firebird Gold titles. After the untimely and tragic death of James Scoular, Firebird needed reorganising.

Joss Ellis came in as Contract Development Manager and gave vital support to Herbert on Elite and other projects. Herbert was made acting Head of Firebird and four months later was confirmed on a permanent basis. His mission was to maximise Elite and build-up Firebird's reputation on the higher-priced Gold range of which Elite was the flagship.

From Gamer to Play-tester

Richard Hewison was kind enough to tell us about his involvement with the world of Elite. He joined Firebird in the late 80's and was lucky enough to be involved with the 16 bit versions. He went on to do testing on Frontier: Elite II.

Looking back, I've always felt that being a tiny cog in the history of Elite was a privilege.

I began in the same way as everyone else, rushing out to buy Elite as soon as it was available. In my case for the 48k Spectrum. I can remember reading the manual cover to cover before I'd even got it home. I'll admit that I didn't read the novella straight away; I was just far too keen to get started exploring the galaxy.

My first impression was that the game looked a little sparse and colourless. However, that initial twinge of disappointment soon disappeared as I started planning what to do first, where to go and how to survive long enough to make a profit.

It took me a while to survive being shot at and to blast the other ships into that tiny but satisfying cloud of white dots. However, slowly but surely I began to rack up the credits and started exploring further away from those familiar systems like Lave and Diso. I never did reach Elite status, but I grew to love the experience even if I never had enough time to play it as much as I'd have liked.

Fast-forward a few more years and I found myself in the lucky, enviable position of getting a job working for TelecomSoft, publisher of the vast majority of the Elite conversions that followed the BBC original.

"Play-testing games was a fantastic job for a 20-year old gamer in the late 1980s."

Play-testing games was a fantastic job for a 20-year old gamer in the late 1980s. I was just the new est member of a small group of testers who were responsible for ensuring that Rainbird, Firebird and Silverbird games didn't get published until all the bugs had been found and squashed.

By the time I joined, all of the 8-bit conversions of Elite were done and dusted. However, the 16-bit Atari ST and Commodore Amiga were starting to dominate the market and the 16-bit conversions of Elite were already in development. Mr Micro had previously tackled the MSX version, and they were given the job of upgrading the game.

The Atari ST and Commodore Amiga versions were originally supposed to have a number of new missions (to expand the five that some of the 8-bit versions got), and so us testers were asked to come up with scenarios for the new 16-bit exclusive missions. I honestly don't remember what my colleagues did, but I suggested a mission that relied solely on the use of the Cobra Mk III's scanner, navigating a nebula and blasting space mines with the canopy closed to block out the blinding light from the nebula. If that scenario sounds familiar, it was unashamedly stolen from the pilot episode of the original Battlestar Galactica!

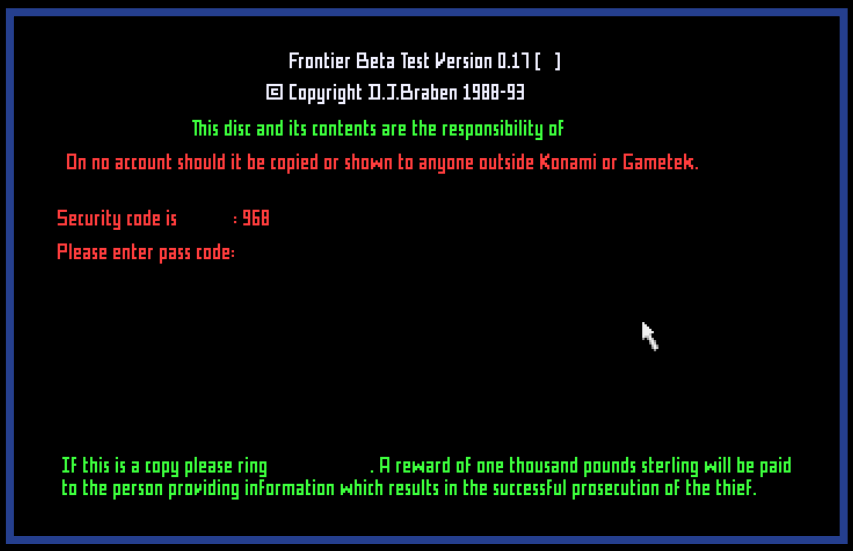
Sadly, the new missions weren't included in the end. I don't remember being told why, but I'd imagine in the end it was down to a lack of time and money.

Time to hit that fast-forward button again. Five years later, I was still working in the UK games industry but was now a freelancer, writing manuals and play-testing for a variety of different publishers. By a happy coincidence, a former TelecomSoft colleague was now working for Konami UK and they had recently signed the long-awaited Elite sequel – Frontier: Elite II – being written by David Braben for the ST, Amiga and PC.

I got in touch and volunteered my services, keeping everything crossed as I was really keen to dive back into Elite once again. Thankfully, Konami agreed and so I was sent development versions of the Amiga original to test. I was in good company, as Gary Penn (of Newsfield Zzap! 64 fame) was also working on the project, testing the game and writing the manual. It seemed clear quite early on that the sequel was a huge leap forward compared to the original, and that it was also stretching the 16-bit hardware to the limit with its scope and innovative 3D system.

Thankfully, by then I had the faster, better equipped Amiga A1200 (with a 40Mb hard drive) so the testing wasn't quite as painful as it otherwise could have been! I was given no manual or instructions at all, but simply had to dive in and work it all out. Sometimes it was best to make no assumptions and ask as many questions as I could as early in the development process as possible. My early bug reports were therefore choc-full of comments and questions as well as reporting bugs.

Disks were arriving in the post on a fairly regular basis. They were all keyword protected, from a sheet that Konami provided. A message from David Braben on the initial loading screen made sure that nobody was in doubt what would happen if any of the development versions got leaked and each disk was personalised.



Above: A screenshot from the Frontier development disk for v0.17 on the Amiga (Tester's name and David's phone number have been edited out)

I play-tested Frontier: Elite II for many months, and ended up with a very long list of bugs and comments that had swelled to over 250 when suddenly it was announced that Konami was handing over publication of the game to Gametek. The moment that happened, the disks stopped coming. I was paid for my work, but was no longer involved in getting the game over the finishing line and into the shops.

I remember calling Gametek and was told that they wouldn't need my testing services. Considering the number of issues I felt the game still had, I was very surprised when – just a few months later – the game was released.

The only way I was going to see the final version was to buy the game like everyone else, so in many ways I was coming full circle, rushing out and buying Frontier: Elite II on the day of release. I decided to buy the PC version which I had had no involvement with at all, so was mildly surprised to see my name at the back of the PC manual as 'Tester' when I'd only ever seen the Amiga version!

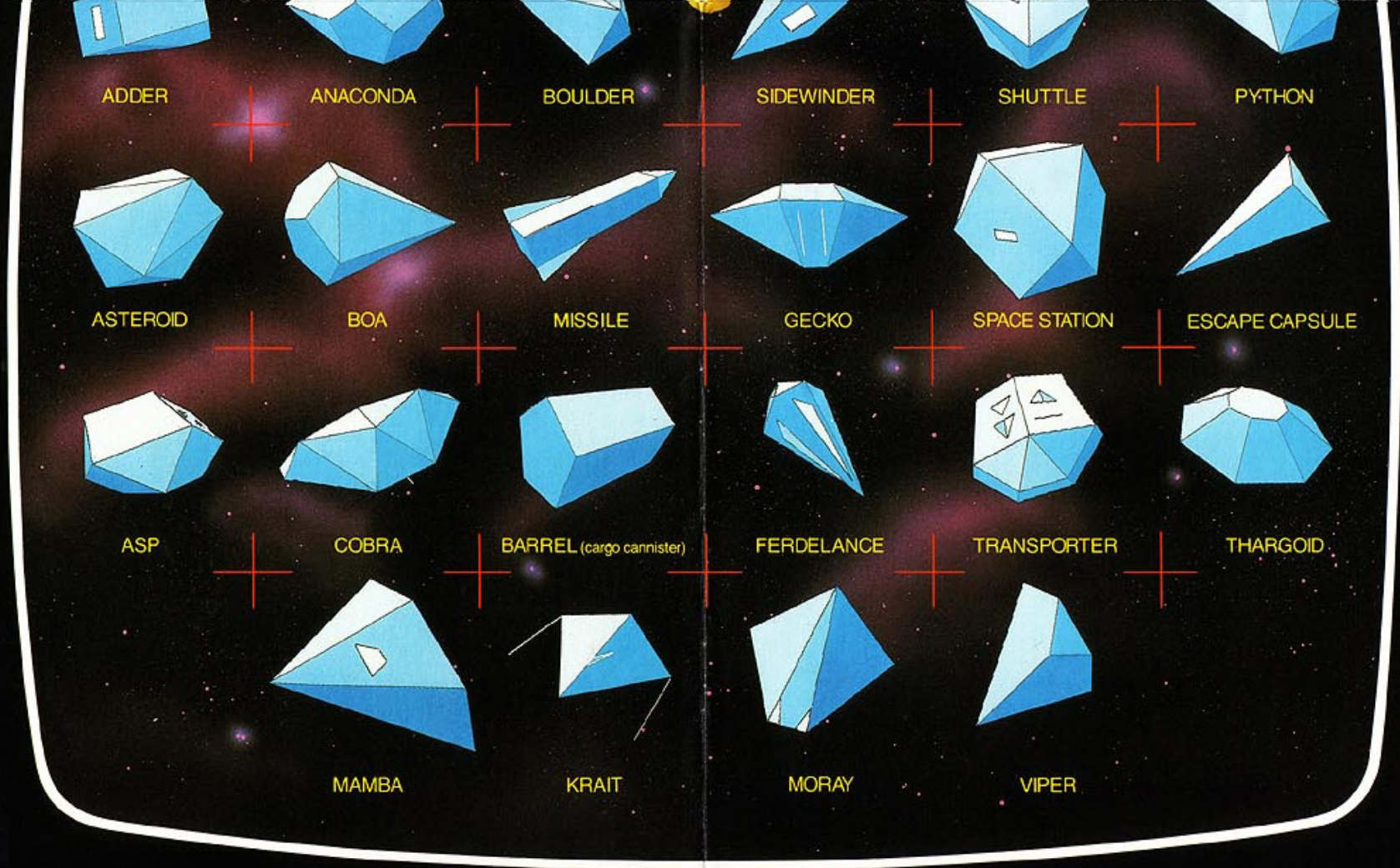
Richard Hewison

+++ MAPPING THE GALAXY +++

There was one other task I was given by Konami before Gametek took on publishing duties. I was asked to plot a section of the galaxy on graph paper, so that a full-colour map could be included in the box. I honestly can't remember how many light years across that small section of the galaxy was, but I do remember that it took three solid days and a vast amount of graph paper to transcribe onto paper (using coloured pencils) what I saw on-screen in the 3D galaxy map. Every time I see a picture of that map, I recall the effort it took to get that done.

Oh, and I never quite got to Elite status in the sequel either!

·SHIP IDENTIFICATION CHART·



FIREBIRD

* Some versions of Elite do not feature all the above ships.

This Ship Identification Chart was included in a number of Firebird's Elite releases including the Commodore 64, ZX Spectrum, Apple IIe and Amstrad CPC versions. Later games such as those for the Amiga, Atari ST and Nintendo Entertainment System did not include the Ship Identification Chart.

Chapter Seven

ELITE

Commodore 64

"The game of a lifetime"

1985, Zzap! 64 magazine

Commodore 64 ELITE, featuring the brilliantly executed 'Trumbles mission' and David Dunn's rendition of The Blue Danube resplendantly playing through the '64s SID chip resulted in a significantly better offering than its ZX Spectrum counterpart.

COMMODORE 64 ELITE

The Commodore 64 conversion was released by Firebird in 1985 and was one of the most popular conversions of Elite seeing local release versions in both the USA and in Germany.

The Commodore 64 version was released on both cassette and 5 1/4” floppy disc.

The original disk versions were not stocked by many stores, partly due the low uptake of discs in the UK, but also due to the upgrade offer that was included with all cassette versions. One only had to send in their original cassette along with £4 that covered postage and packaging, and Firebird would send out a 5 1/4” floppy disc version.

Many took up the offer and it is common to find floppy discs contained within a cassette box. The original floppy disk box, identified by an adhesive sticker over the cassette logo and barcode, were not sold in great numbers. This has resulted in original floppy disc versions commanding very high prices on the second hand market.

Floppy Disk Variations

The disk provided with the second USA release features an updated version of the Elite software. Many Commodore users from the ‘80s recall the iconic “Load New Commander (Y/N)?” screen music that accompanied the updated version whilst the game loaded, although it is unclear whether the UK release had any visual identifier between versions.

The Commodore 64 conversion was the first in a long line of Firebird releases of Elite.

COMPUTER DATA

Model:	Commodore 64
Manufacturer:	Commodore International
Year Released:	1982
CPU:	MOS 6510/8500
Clock:	1.023 MHz
Memory:	64 kB
Resolution:	320 x 200
Colours:	16 colours
Original Price:	£399

ELITE COMES TO THE COMMODORE 64

The Commodore 64 version of Elite is the best version of Elite.

Elite is a personal journey. Discovery, adventure, danger and victory. Excitement and jealously as a friend, eye gleaming, tells you about finally buying that military laser you're thousands of credits away from affording. A literal arms race.

With some crafty, almost non-Euclidean coding, Braben and Bell squeezed so much into the C64 version. Extra missions, a flotilla of different ships, lovable trumbles, the evil Thargoids and the docking computer bringing strains of the Blue Danube.

C64 Elite is, as they now say, *feature rich*.

Colourful and vibrant, C64 Elite is also beautiful to look at. Stars glitter, suns burn, the universe spins away slowly before you, full of potential and inevitability.

"Space never looked so good."

Utilising the C64s sprite capability, explosive bursts rock your Cobra Mk III, trumbles ... err ... trumble.

Space never looked so good.

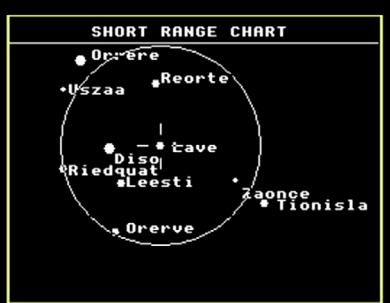
Conflict is ever present with a poorly calculated jump landing you in a Dictatorship, fighting desperately for an edge. That excitement, fear even, is still there, as rastered lasers lance across the bitmapped screen, eating shields and hull and suddenly there's your cargo drifting off into the black.
C64 Elite leverages the power of the machine to add features to make you want to pursue the end game. Tracking a stolen ship across the galaxy. Desperate battles with Thargoids, cursing as they disgorge swarms of Thargons.

The stuff of legend.

And your finger hovers tentatively above the key to engage the Galactic Hyperspace and with a stab space-time folds in upon itself in an explosion of white. Scant seconds to wonder if you'll get ripped into Witchspace or if, as you careen into the next galaxy, you will see at last that mythical Generation Ship (that your friend spoke about in hushed whispers) moving majestically to stars unknown.

This is Elite.

Reviewed by Anthony Stiller



C64 ELITE IN THE USA!

The first version of the USA release of Elite contained the same versions of the Space Traders Flight Trading Manual, Quick Key Control Guide and The Dark Wheel novella as the UK release.

The competition form had a USA address and the warranty card was provided by Firebird New Jersey.

Both versions have "Strategic Space Trading and Combat Adventure with Flight Simulation" written across the front of the box. No other Firebird editions, with the exception of the Apple II E version, include this text on the box cover.

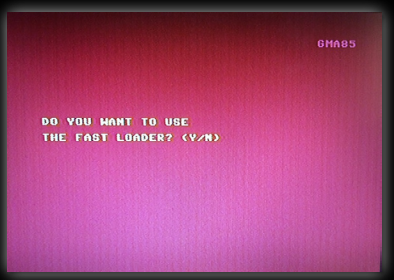
The Ship Identification Chart for both versions appears to be a subtly different printing to the UK version, as it does not contain the disclaimer on the lower right corner that states, "Some versions of Elite do not feature all the above ships." This is probably because only the Commodore 64/128 and Apple II E versions were released by Firebird USA and all ships were included in both versions.

The printed material in the second version is unique to that version. The Space Traders Flight Training Manual has a heavier stock cover, but more noticeably the title block is now an orange/yellow rather than the more familiar red. Both the Control guide and the Flight Manual covers have a thin laminated finish. The Dark Wheel novella appears at first glance to be unchanged, however a comparison against the UK version reveals a lighter stock cover, although the content including a 'Printed in England' on the copyright page appears to be unchanged.

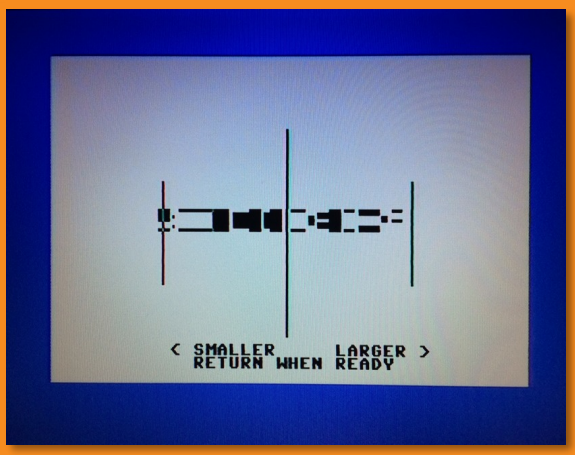
The later version underwent a minor variation part way through its release cycle. In what have been considered a bad move in hindsight, Firebird New Jersey had the later version boxes printed with "Fly To Britain Competition" across where one would normally see the "Gold Edition" logo. Once the competition ended, there was still plenty of stock left so Firebird New Jersey had "Gold" stickers applied over the competition on remaining stock.

The included registration and warranty cards are again USA based with return addresses to Firebird New Jersey.

The second version of the USA floppy disk release also included the on-screen option to use a fast loader.



The Commodore 64 Elite Fast Loader screen.



Did you know?

Although thought by many to be unique in the Elite world to the early Sinclair ZX Spectrum versions, in a somewhat unusual move Firebird also implemented Lenslok technology in the first version of the Commodore 64 Elite released in the USA.

COMMODORE 64

CASSETTE VERSION

CONTENTS CHECKLIST:

- ☐ C64 cassette version game box
- ☐ Space Traders Flight Training Manual
- ☐ The Dark Wheel novella
- ☐ C64 Quick Key Control Guide
- ☐ C64 game cassette
- ☐ Ship Identification Chart
- ☐ C64 keyboard overlay
- ☐ Disc Upgrade Offer postcard
- ☐ Order of Elite Membership postcard

COMMODORE 64

DISK VERSION

CONTENTS CHECKLIST:

- ☐ C64 disk version game box
- ☐ Space Traders Flight Training Manual
- ☐ The Dark Wheel novella
- ☐ C64 Quick Key Control Guide
- ☐ C64 game disk
- ☐ Ship Identification Chart
- ☐ C64 keyboard overlay
- ☐ Order of Elite Membership postcard

COMMODORE 64™
COMMODORE 128™

USA EARLY VERSION

CONTENTS CHECKLIST:

- ☐ C64/128 early version game box
- ☐ Space Traders Flight Training Manual
- ☐ The Dark Wheel novella
- ☐ C64/128 Quick Key Control Guide
- ☐ Game disk
- ☐ Ship Identification Chart
- ☐ Warranty Card
- ☐ Order of Elite Membership postcard
- ☐ C64 keyboard overlay
- ☐ Lenslok device

COMMODORE 64/128K™

USA LATE VERSION

CONTENTS CHECKLIST:

- ☐ C64/128 late version game box
- ☐ Space Traders Flight Training Manual
- ☐ The Dark Wheel novella
- ☐ C64/128 Quick Key Control Guide
- ☐ Game Disk
- ☐ Ship Identification Chart
- ☐ Warranty Card
- ☐ Registration Card
- ☐ C64 keyboard overlay

COMMODORE 64

GERMAN DISK VERSION

CONTENTS CHECKLIST:

- ☐ C64 German game box
- ☐ Space Traders Flight Training Manual
- ☐ German The Dark Wheel novella
- ☐ C64 German Quick Key Control Guide
- ☐ C64 game disk
- ☐ Ship Identification Chart
- ☐ C64 German keyboard overlay

LEROY'S HELPBOOK FOR ELITE

Leroy's Cheatsheets were a USA based company operating out of Pittsburg, PA. who primarily produced keyboard overlays for computers such as the Commodore 64, Commodore 128 and Apple II range of computers. Many of the overlays were for a variety of word processors, data bases, spreadsheets and programming aids.

They also produced overlays for a number of 'keyboard intensive' games like Flight Simulator II and of course Elite.

The keyboard overlays were a fantastic idea although the Commodore 64 version of Elite came with one 'out of the box', the Leroy's one surrounded the whole keyboard which provided the opportunity to include text and images around the borders.

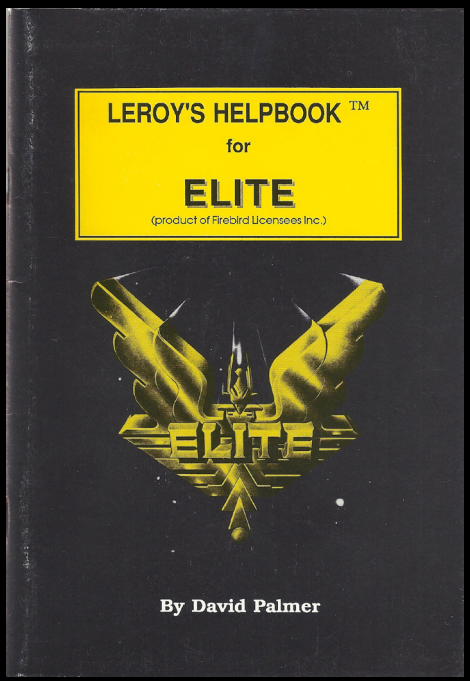
In the case of Elite, the overlay included trading controls, game controls, navigation controls, combat controls, hyperspace controls and more.

It also included a ceter section that when cut out could be set aside and referred to as it contained details on friendly and unfriendly ships, as well as an overview of the radar display and control panel.

To supplement the overlay, Leroy's also produced a helpbook for Elite which was written by David Palmer, who is credited as the first person in the United States to achieve Elite status.

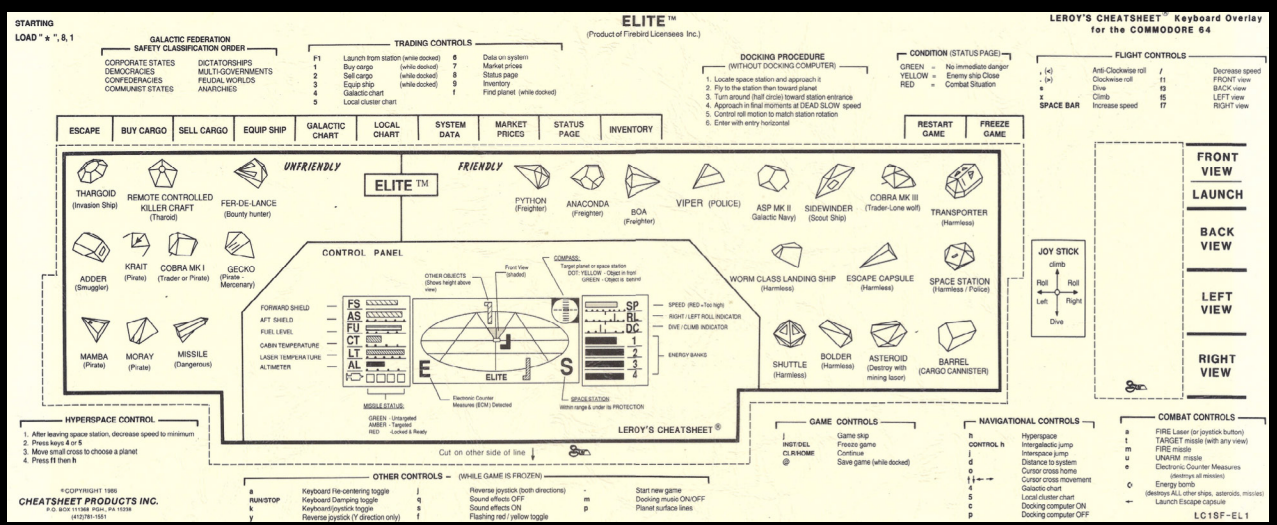
The helpbook covers a number of important game aspects including coming to grips to basic flight, combat, approaching and docking at a space station (the bane of every rookie pilot), trading, time saving measures, missions, and hints and tips on starting the game.

The ELITE keyboard overlays were available for the Commodore 64, Commodore 128, Apple IIe and Apple IIc computers.



Above: Leroy's Helpbook for ELITE by David Palmer

Below: Leroy's Cheatsheet's ELITE keyboard overlay for the Commodore 64



Chapter Eight

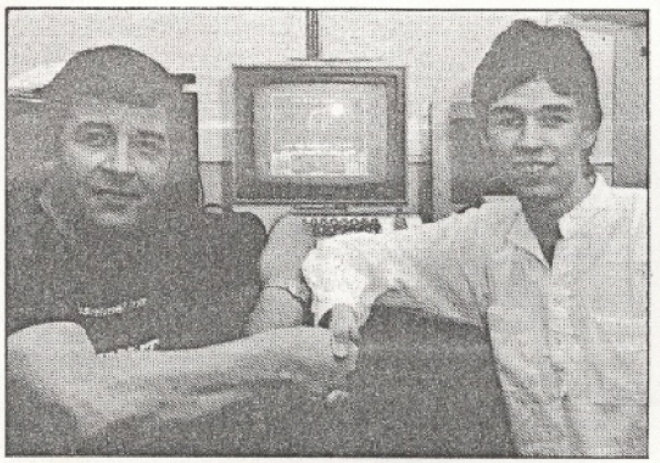
ELITE

World Championships

"Let me congratulate you, from everyone at Firebird, on being a deserving winner of the U.K. Elite Championship."

1986, Letter from Phil Pratt (Firebird) to Colin McClinton

(L-R) USA Elite Champion Fred Beyer, Herbert Wright and UK Elite Champion Colin McClinton at the Elite 'world' play-offs.



Colin McClinton (right) with runner up Fred Bayer

Colin joins the world's élite

AMID rumours that an Archimedes version of the BBC Micro cult game is in the pipeline, the Elite world championships have resulted in victory for Britain over the USA.

Firebird's London headquarters was buzzing with the story that Ian Bell and David Braben are working on Elite II for the Risc machine, as 19-year-old Colin McClinton from Belfast beat Fred Bayer, an independent film-maker from Oregon, after a mighty eight-hour battle.

Colin earned his right to compete at the London play-offs as long ago as March last year. Fred fought through a similarly close-contested American competition.

Having already won prizes of software and foreign travel, the orders for Colin and Fred were simply to kill as much as possible – starting as Dangerous with a mere 3,000 credits and a single-beam laser.

Both players – fully aware that Elite success is met with increased danger that only vigorous trading and rearmament can handle – spent the early period trading furiously to gain weapons and shielding before they tried any serious mayhem.

At the lunch break things were about even, but as the afternoon wore on Colin began to demonstrate a ferocity increasingly hard to match. While Fred had a nifty turn of speed in a tight corner, he began to lose confidence against a sharper opponent.

With an hour still to go, Fred conceded defeat. Although his score of 255 kill points was impressive, Colin's was nearly twice this. The winner's reward is an expenses-paid trip to the USA later.

This article appeared in the September 1987 issue of Micro User magazine and detailed Colin and Fred's battle to become the Elite World Champion

A Postcard from Space

The Tale of How a Boy from Belfast Became "Elite" Champion of the World

Back in 1985 I used to rent computer games for my Commodore 64 every week. Renting games for a week from a computer game library was very much the norm in 1985, and a week of play time with any game was usually more than enough. Of course there were a lot of great games that you wanted to have in your collection and play for longer, and for those I had my trusty twin cassette tape deck. You can fit a lot of games on a C90 tape!

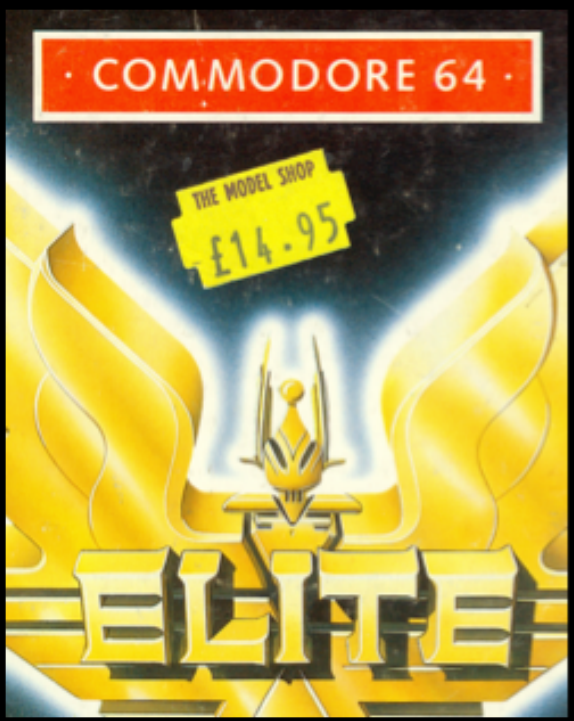
One week I rented Elite it was in a box brimming with stuff, a keyboard overlay, a poster, a manual, a novel and in my rented copy of the game the torn stub of a postcard that promised world travel and prizes galore, all you had to do was return the now missing section of that postcard.

After the first week of playing my rented copy of Elite I knew I wasn't anywhere near done playing this game in fact I hadn't even scratched the surface, but there was also a new and unusual feeling of actually wanting to own a copy of this game and all of the things that came in that box.

I found myself in the local model shop handing over £14.95 for a brand new sealed copy of Elite, this box contained all the same goodies as the one I had rented but the postcard was now complete. I read it again, and realised I could now apply for 'Elite Membership' possibly even be awarded the 'Order of Elite' and win a collection of Firebird games. That would really help offset the £14.95 I had just spent on this one game.

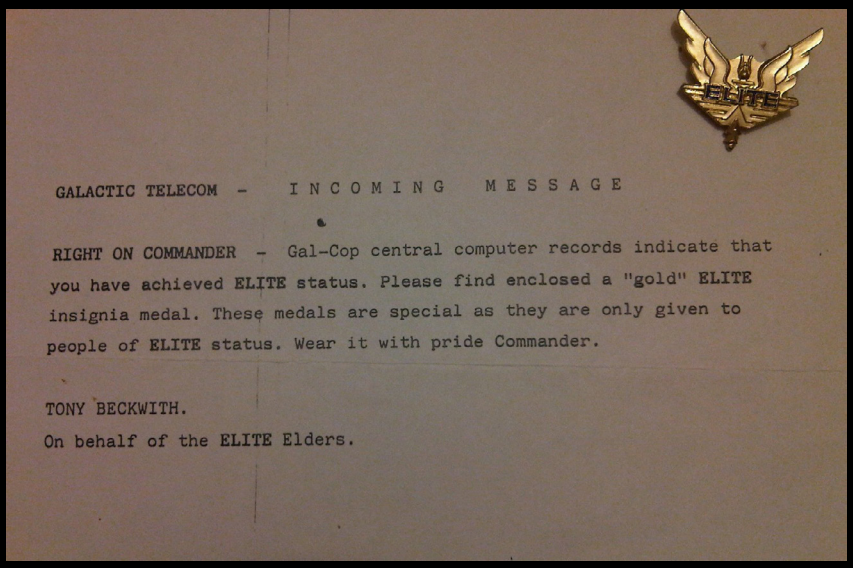
"There was a problem, as I didn't know how much of a head start other people had on me..."

There was a problem, as I didn't know how much of a head start other people had on me, and if I returned the postcard with a lowly status of 'Competent' I would surely miss out, but if I waited too long to submit everyone would have reached the much higher ranks of Dangerous, Deadly or even Elite.



Above: The very game box that contained the postcard that helped make Colin one of "The Order of Elite"

I set about my task, I played a lot of Elite, I traded and learned how to earn credits, spent them wisely upgrading my ship all while travelling the stars. At first I stuck to safe democratic systems trading in legal goods afraid of the consequences of not doing so, but before long I was deep inside anarchy systems taking down anything that stood in my way, and the phrase 'Right on Commander' was regularly popping up on my screen. Sleep had become something only to be indulged when the morning sun disturbed a night of combat and trade.



GALACTIC TELECOM - INCOMING MESSAGE

RIGHT ON COMMANDER - Gal-Cop central computer records indicate that you have achieved ELITE status. Please find enclosed a "gold" ELITE insignia medal. These medals are special as they are only given to people of ELITE status. Wear it with pride Commander.

TONY BECKWITH.
On behalf of the ELITE Elders.

Above: Colin's Galactic Telecom message issuing him a gold Elite insignia medal

Competent turned to Dangerous, and I thumbed the postcard perhaps this was a high enough rank, not yet I thought. Dangerous turned to Deadly and then another 'Right on Commander' message and I was Elite. It was August, Elite had only been on the market for the Commodore 64 for a few months and it was the only the third month in which anyone could have submitted their postcard, I had missed the first month June, and had played through the month of July. August would be my month, I continued to play to the end of the month, no point in submitting too early in the month might as well make the most of the time, before completing that postcard and sending it off to Firebird.

Sometime later I received a small letter acknowledging that I had reached Elite status and pinned to it was a gold badge of the Elite insignia, now that really was something special a physical recognition of an in game rank.

Then in September a package arrived with a collection of games and a letter proclaiming that I had been placed first in August and would be awarded the 'Order of Elite' and be invited to the play-offs at the end of the year. That £14.95 investment was looking pretty good now.

"...later I received a small letter acknowledging that I had reached Elite status and pinned to it was a gold badge of the Elite insignia..."

The play-offs where delayed until March 1986 when I and fourteen other Elite commanders converged on London to spend 4 hours playing Elite to see who would come out on top. I had never seen so many Commodore 64s in one place all running Elite with that spinning Cobra MKIII on the start screen. Initially there was mostly silence in the room with only the sound of docking and launching and the occasional sound of a pulse laser. Then the distinctive sound of beam lasers filled the room as commanders transitioned from trade to combat, followed by the unmistakable sound of military grade weaponry being used.

Time was up, but Elite doesn't have a score so there was no easy way to know who had won, a lunch break was in order during which Firebird adjudicated, converting game save codes to mystical hexadecimal numbers that would ultimately reveal a kill count.

Below: The top half of Colin's original Order of Elite membership postcard...

· ELITE MEMBERSHIP ·

ORDER OF ELITE

The ultimate accolade for an Elite Cadet has to be acceptance to the famed 'Order of Elite', but only a chosen few ever achieve this honoured status.

The selection procedure is simple, but formidable. Once you've attained the rank of 'Competent' or higher, and filled in the questionnaire, you're eligible to enter. Each Cadet will receive a large full colour poster and the official 'Order of Elite' insignia. Every month until November 1985, the top three Cadets who, in the opinion of the Elite elders, show the greatest skill within that calendar month will be awarded the **'Order of Elite'**. In addition, each will receive the complete range of Firebird's Commodore 64 software, plus the top Cadet in each month will get a framed and personally inscribed 'Elite' award.

In December 1985 those Cadets who have been awarded the 'Order of Elite' will be invited to take part in a Grand Play-off – with a week in Manhattan as the prize.

The next thing I knew I was holding a bottle of Champaign and had been flanked on either side by none other than David Braben and Ian Bell as I was declared the winner of the UK Elite Championship.

Above: Colin celebrates victory with (l-r) Ian Bell, David Braben and Herbert Wright

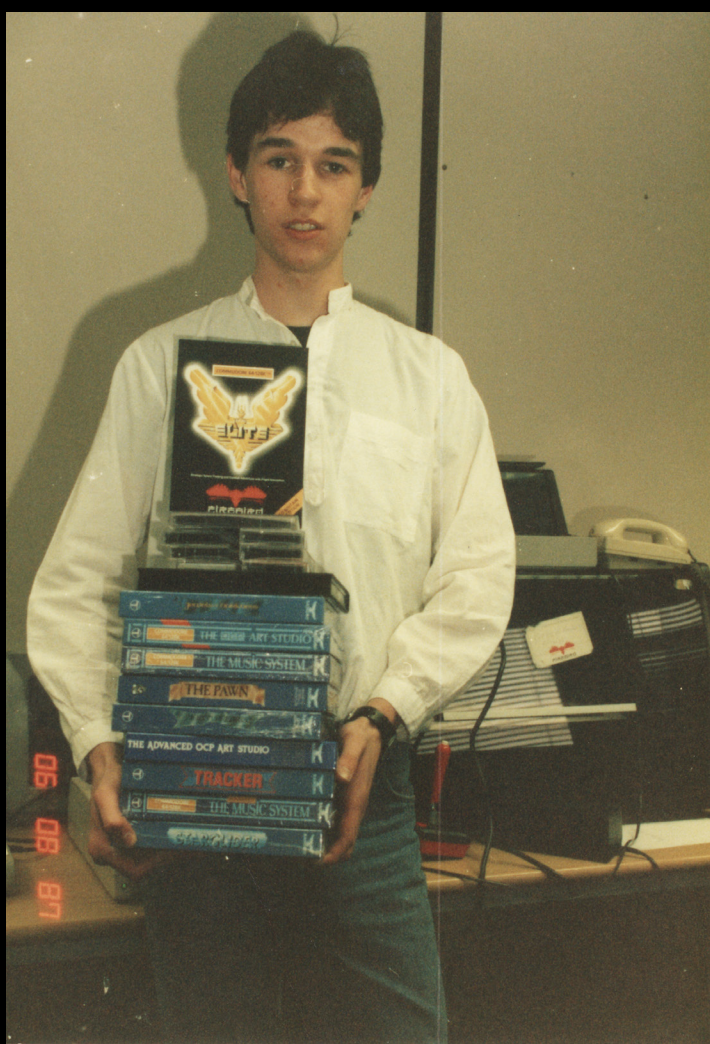
But Firebird was not finished with me yet, I was only the UK Elite Champion, if I was prepared to hold off on taking my prize of international travel they would arrange a World Championship to allow me to play against the best Elite commander that the USA could muster.

"...as I was declared the winner of the UK Elite Championship."

Due to the later release of Elite in the USA it was not until August 1987 that the USA were ready to challenge the best that the UK had to offer. This encounter was to begin in London when my hotel room door was knocked, and the US champion Fred Beyer introduced himself to me. What followed was an evening of eating and drinking in the Covent Garden and a friendship between people with wildly different backgrounds brought together by a computer game.

The following day, both of us ever so slightly hung-over played against each other, and while

From left (clockwise): V for victory!, Colin won Firebird's entire C64 catalogue of games, Fred and Colin playing Elite.



I would ultimately be declared World Champion because of an abstract hexadecimal value. The USA champion Fred Beyer and the UK champion Colin McClinton formed a friendship as we brought to conclusion the journey that the Elite completion had led us on.

Of course to truly end the story Firebird came good on their postcard promise of international travel and sent me off to New York in October 1987 for a week long holiday with £500 spending money.

During that week I met with the Firebird team in New Jersey which ended with an evening of drinking the end result of which found me the next day in Hoboken New Jersey looking over the Hudson River to Manhattan without a cent in my pocket. Fortunately a couple of elderly ladies gave a hopelessly lost Elite commander enough money to get back to his hotel in Manhattan.

That my friends is how the innocuous postcard included in every 1985 box of Elite for the Commodore 64 completed in Belfast Northern Ireland can result in you being penniless in Hoboken New Jersey.

Above: Colin's return ticket to America!

"I would ultimately be declared World Champion..."

Below: A few of Colin's holiday photographs...

GALACTIC TELECOM – Transmission of Intergalactic message now follows...

I N C O M I N G M E S S A G E

RIGHT ON COMMANDER – You have been awarded the "**ORDER OF ELITE**" for AUGUST as you graduated as the number **ONE** cadet of that month. Please find enclosed the entire **FIREBIRD** CBM 64 range of software. We would also like to remind you that you will also be entitled to compete in the **ELITE** "play-off" which will be held in December of this year – more Galactic messages will follow regarding this. The winner of the "play-off" will be awarded a weeks holiday in Manhattan – so get practising now because the competition will be very tough.

—— GOOD LUCK COMMANDER ——

TONY BECKWITH.

On behalf of the **ELITE** Elders.

Order of Elite award letter
(August 1985)

Colin's Order of Elite award
(August 1985)

FIREBIRD

G A L A C T I C T E L E M E S S A G E

HAIL COMMANDER - As the "Elite" competition play-off draws nearer, I would just like to verify that you have received our message notifying you of your position in the Elite competition. Firstly, could you verify that you know what month you won in and what position you came in that month. Secondly, could you tell me your current security code number so that I may know how well you have progressed since your initial entry to the competition. Also if you have any particular Commander name that you use (ie Commander Killer) then I would be interested in knowing that too.

You should by now have received a GOLD Elite insignia medal and our present entire range of CBM 64 software. Please tell us if you have not received any of this and I will try to track down where it went.

Commanders who came in first position in any particular month will receive a framed Elite Award at the actual play-offs. Everyone will receive a variety of other Elite "goodies".

Enclosed with this letter is an Elite "high score table" to show you how well you have come off compared to everyone else. Understandably, some of you have appeared low in this chart because of the early time that their competition entries were sent in. This is why I need your current security code (and number of credits) so that I may assess your current standing.

TONY BECKWITH.
On Behalf of the Elite Elders.

Competition play-off letter
(November 1985)

FIREBIRD

THE ELITE HIGH SCORE TABLE

- NOVEMBER -

Position	Name	Age	Address	Position & Month	Original Kills	Personal Best	Commander Name
1st	COLIN McCLINTON	17	BELFAST	1st in August.	9,216	14,848	- WOLF -
2nd	DAVID SIE	18	LONDON	2nd in Sept.	8,960	14,592x	- DAVE -
3rd	YAM CHOI LEE	22	LONDON	1st in Sept.	11,520	11,520	- -
4th	ALAN DAVIES	21	STOCKPORT	2nd in August.	8,704	11,264	- STARFOX -
5th	JOSEPH MOYA	17	LONDON	1st in October.	11,264	11,264x	
6th	RICHARD SIMMONS	15	KENT	3rd in August.	7,424	9,984	- SIMMO -
7th	IAN DAVIES	15	MANCHESTER	2nd in October.	9,472	9,472	
8th	DAVID JONES	18	LONDON	1st in July.	8,448	8,448	
9th	IAN PITCHFORD	26	NOTTS	2nd in July.	7,424	7,936	
10th	KAFAI WU	22	BIRMINGHAM	3rd in Sept.	7,680	7,680	
11th	PAUL REID	16	GLASGOW	3rd in October.	7,680	7,680	
12th	ANDREW GRIFO	15	MANCHESTER	3rd in July.	6,912	6,912	- GRIFO -
13th	SIMON MALONEY	16	CHESHIRE	1st in June.	1,280	2,816x	- ZAPSKI -
14th	ROY HARRINGTON	16	TYNE & WEAR	2nd in June.	1,024	1,024	
15th	JOHN SADOT	19	JERSEY	3rd in June.	768	768	

x means the person has forced themselves into Witch Space using the Cheat Mode!

Press INST/DEL,X,CLR/HOME and hold down CTRL whilst hyperspacing to get into Witch Space.

Press INST/DEL,X,C,(left arrow key) to get music.

4th and 5th are joint positions.

10th and 11th are joint positions.

Competition player rankings (November 1985)

British TELECOM

Firebird Software
Wellington House
Upper St Martin's Lane
LONDON
WC2H 9DL

Telephone number
National 01-379 6755
International +44 1-379 6755

HAIL COMMANDER!

I bear bad tidings, I'm afraid. The Elite play-off has had to be postponed due to a mix up at Galactic Telecom. Anyway, we are now on course for a play-off in February (1986!). In the meantime, thanks to all of those who have sent back their questionairres - how about those that haven't?

Enclosed is the new updated high score table which I will keep regularly updated using the GalCop central records computer (Thats a BBC to you and me!). Please note that this month we have three more players added to the list - the October winners.

In between now and February I will keep you topped up with software for our CBM 64 range - expect to receive SABRE WULF and UNDERWURLDE soon.

The play-offs will be in London (sometime in February) and I am afraid that you will have to organise travelling plans and expenses yourselfs. Due to crowding problems we would prefer it if you didn't bring friends or parents unless absolutely necessary. You will also be required to bring along a joystick (if you are not keyboard orientated) and a Commodore Cassette player to save your commander positions. Playing will last a couple of hours and some refreshments will be provided. None of you will go home empty-handed because we will definitely have some software and goodies for you.

The winner of the play-offs will be the person who makes the most kills at time-up!

The framed awards for the top winners in each month will also be presented at the play-offs.

More intricate instructions and the official rules will follow.

TONY BECKWITH.
1st President of GalCop.

New Information Services

British Telecommunications plc
Registered Office 81 Newgate Street LONDON EC1A 7AJ
Registered in England No. 1800000

The competition play-off was delayed (January 1986)

British TELECOM

Firebird Software
Wellington House
Upper St Martin's Lane
LONDON
WC2H 9DL

Telephone number
National 01-379 6755
International +44 1-379 6755

Dear Competition Winner,

This is your last reminder that the Elite Competition Play-offs will be held at Docos House, Commercial Road, London on 24th March. It would be appreciated if you haven't, if you could confirm whether you will be able to attend the play-offs.

I would like to remind you that you will start from scratch as commander JAMESON and you will have to work your way up as far as possible in the FOUR hours allocated.

You may bring your own joystick if you don't like Keyboard play.

Hopefully, the authors of Elite, the famous duo "Bell and Braben" will be attending the play-offs and so you will be able to question them on Elite.

If you want to chat, you can talk to me on the Elite Hotline on 01-379 7180.

I look forward to meeting you all.

Yours sincerely,

TONY BECKWITH

PS Wear your Gold Elite Badges to the play-offs!!

New Information Services

British Telecommunications plc
Registered Office 81 Newgate Street LONDON EC1A 7AJ
Registered in England No. 1800000

The competition play-off date was set for March (January 1986)

British TELECOM

Firebird Software

Wellington House
Upper St Martin's Lane
LONDON
WC2H 9DL

Telephone number
National 01-379 6755
International +44 1-379 6755

Dear Elite Winner,

At last a final date has been set for the Elite competition. The competition will be held on Monday, 24th March 1986 at the address in London enclosed. I have also enclosed a map to help you 'navigate' yourself to the play offs. The play offs will start at 11.00 am so make sure you give yourself plenty of time to get there.

All players will be presented with a copy of REVS and NIGHTSHADE for the CBM 64. We should also have a number of fresh new releases to present you with. The winners in each month will also be presented with large framed Elite Awards.

RULES

1) The winner will be the person who (in our opinion) makes the most kills as identified by the Elite Security Code.
2) The play off will be held from 11 am to 3pm on 24th March 1986 at Docos House, 62, Commercial Road, LONDON, E1 1NR.
3) The total playing time is 4 hours to 'destroy' as much as possible.
4) Players can save their positions to either tape or disc but they must bring their own tape recorders or disc drives plus blank tape(s) or disc(s).
5) You may save your position as often as you like and we would recommend this. We cannot be held responsible for any crashes that occur during the play offs. A spare CBM 64 will be made available.
6) The winner will be based on his Security Number but should a draw occur then his position will be evaluated from his best saved file.
7) The Elite Elders (to be specified by Firebird) will have the last decision in all matters.

Please bring a joystick if you require one and a cassette recorder or disc drive. Don't forget a blank tape or formatted disc to save your commanders on. Should there be a draw in number of kills then we shall evaluate you from the number of credits you have or special missions that you have obtained. Entering Witch SPace by the cheating method is allowed. Should a crash occur then we will endeavour to re-load the game as fast as possible by Disc Drive. Some refreshments will be supplied. Don't bring any friends or parents unless you really have to.

Yours sincerely,

TONY BECKWITH.

New Information Services

British Telecommunications plc
Registered Office 81 Newgate Street LONDON EC1A 7AJ
Registered in England No. 1800000

The competition play-off rules
(January 1986)

British TELECOM

Firebird Software
Wellington House
Upper St Martin's Lane
LONDON
WC2H 9DL

Telephone number
National 01-379 6755
International +44 1-379 6755

Colin McClinton

25.3.86.

Dear Colin

First,let me congratulate you,from everyone at Firebird,on being a deserving winner of the U.K. Elite Championship.I hope that you enjoyed the day,and that the fact that you are the top Elite player in the U.K.(and currently therefore, the World) has now sunk in!

I am very pleased that you have agreed to wait until January 1987 before collecting your prize,as this means that the U.K. will be able to show the U.S.A. how to play games properly ! We will keep you informed of exact dates etc,but you are almost certainly going to need to take a couple of weeks off at the end of January.If there are any problems,let us know.

Your photograph is currently being circulated to the press,and will hopefully appear in the next available issues.

Congratulations once again.

Yours sincerely

Phil Pratt.Marketing Manager.

New Information Services

British Telecommunications plc
Registered Office 81 Newgate Street LONDON EC1A 7AJ
Registered in England No. 1800000

This letter was sent to Colin after he had won the UK Elite Championship (March 1986)

Chapter Nine

ELITE

Apple II/IIe/IIc

"It reached the number one slot on Billboard..."

August 1986, Electron User magazine
on the Apple II conversion

The Apple II was the first of the Apple computer models capable of playing ELITE.

Apple II/IIe/IIc ELITE

The Apple II series of computers was first released in 1977 with the Apple II. By the time ELITE was released, the much improved Apple IIe was on the market.

The Apple conversion was done by Ian Bell and was released by Firebird in 1986. Although not a popular machine in the UK, the Apple II series of computers, were amongst the most common American home computers of the mid-'80s.

The Apple II conversion makes good use of the Apple II series of computer's graphics and processing ability to deliver a smooth-running and highly detailed game.

This conversion doesn't suffer from the jerkiness of the Commodore 64 version and features game play smoothness on par with the original BBC Microprocessor version.

The sound on the Apple computers was not up to the high standard of the Commodore 64 conversion, though this was related to Apple sound hardware and not the conversion itself.

One of the greater limitations of the Apple II series of computers is their incompatibility with the then growing range of Atari (and Commodore 64) compatible joysticks. This wasn't a problem if gamers preferred to use the Apple's keyboard.

The early Apple version had a red and chrome coloured Apple II sticker affixed to box front.

COMPUTER DATA

Model:	Apple IIe
Manufacturer:	Apple Inc.
Year Released:	1983
CPU:	MOS 6502
Clock:	1.023 MHz
Memory:	64 kB (expandable to 1 MB)
Resolution:	560 x 160 (B&W only)
Colours:	16 colours
Original Price:	$1,298 USD (approx. £850)

Elite tops US charts

ELITE, the best selling cult adventure for the Electron, has become the first UK game to make it to the top of the American charts – on the Apple.

It reached the number one slot on Billboard – the prestige USA list – after some aggressive marketing by Firebird Licensees.

Originally brought out under the Acornsoft label, it subsequently became the property of Firebird, the software arm of British Telecom.

"It is the first non-American game to make it to the number one spot", says a Firebird spokesman, "so naturally we are delighted".

Above: *The Apple II conversion of Elite was the first non-American game to reach number one on the Billboard software list!*

Did you know?

Early versions of the Apple II "Space Traders Flight Training Manual" had an error on the second page which stated "ELITE For the Commodore 64". An updated version corrected this misprint.

APPLE

EARLY DISK VERSION

CONTENTS CHECKLIST:

- ☐ Apple game box
- ☐ Space Traders Flight Training Manual
- ☐ The Dark Wheel novella
- ☐ Quick Key Control Guide
- ☐ Apple game disk
- ☐ Ship Identification Chart
- ☐ Product registration card

APPLE II / IIc / IIe

“FLY TO BRITAIN” DISK VERSION

CONTENTS CHECKLIST:

- ☐ Apple game box with sticker
- ☐ Space Traders Flight Training Manual
- ☐ The Dark Wheel novella
- ☐ Quick Key Control Guide
- ☐ Order of Elite membership postcard
- ☐ Apple game disk
- ☐ Ship Identification Chart
- ☐ Limited warranty sheet
- ☐ Addendum sheet

APPLE II / IIc / IIe

LATER DISK VERSION

CONTENTS CHECKLIST:

- ☐ Apple game box
- ☐ Space Traders Flight Training Manual
- ☐ The Dark Wheel novella
- ☐ Quick Key Control Guide
- ☐ Apple game disk
- ☐ Ship Identification Chart
- ☐ Product registration card
- ☐ Addendum sheet

Chapter Ten

ELITE

Sinclair ZX Spectrum

"You are allowed three attempts before the computer will reset, making it necessary to re-load the program."

1985, ZX Spectrum Lenslok Instructions for Use

ZX Spectrum ELITE was eminently more playable when a second ship showed up on screen, unlike the Commodore 64 whose display slowed to a crawl as it struggled to render multiple on-screen wireframe vessels.

ZX Spectrum ELITE

The ZX Spectrum was first released as the successor to the ZX81 on the 21st of April 1982. In the eleven years that it was available, it sold a staggering 5 million units, more than three times that of the BBC Microcomputer.

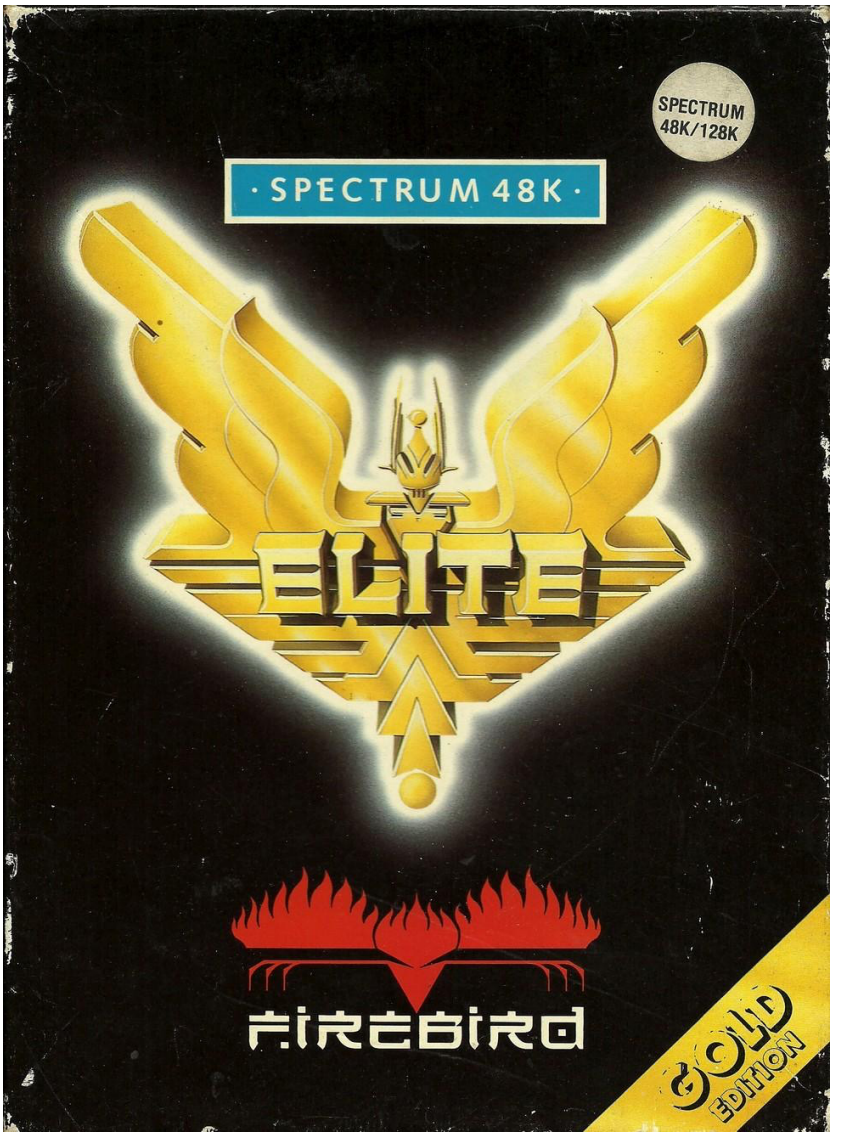
ELITE arrived in ZX Spectrum format late in 1985, some fourteen months after the game's debut on the BBC Micorcomputer and Acorn Electron. By this time, Braben and Bell had auctioned ELITE's publishing rights for other computers and Firebird was the successful bidder.

The ZX Spectrum conversion was undertaken by R.J.M. Pinto, D.M.N. Prior, M. Wighton and P. Mochan with a new title screen programmed by Tim Boone.

Although using less colours than the Commodore 64 and BBC Microcomputer versions, this conversion doesn't suffer from the jerkiness of the Commodore 64 version and features game play smoothness on par with the original BBC Microprocessor version.

The ZX Spectrum packaging included an overlay to fit the ZX Spectrum and although the game was capable of running on later Spectrum models including the ZX Spectrum+ and ZX Spectrum 128, keyboard overlays were never officialy produced for the later machines.

A disc version was made available for use with the Opus Discovery drive and was sold exclusively through Boots. It is now amongst the rarest of versions to obtain.



The ZX Spectrum conversion was the second Firebird release of Elite.

COMPUTER DATA

Model:	ZX Spectrum
Manufacturer:	Sinclair Research Ltd.
Year Released:	1982
CPU:	Zilog Z80 A
Clock:	3.5 MHz
Memory:	48 kB
Resolution:	256 x 192
Colours:	16 colours
Original Price:	£175

The Cobra Mk III Lands on the ZX Spectrum

Envy. That's what it was. Pure and simple envy. The BBC micro was not a games computer first and foremost and, let's be truly honest, the Spectrum was. So why? Why bring out the definitive 80s space-simulator game on the computer only the kids with rich parents could afford? That was my defining memory of how it all started.

The story of Elite, Braben, Bell, Acornsoft and BBC has been told many times over. The procedural generation, the trading, the 3D wireframe graphics, the lack of the high score in favour of cold hard cash... But it was only available to owners of the BBC Micro model B. The rest of us had to wait.

I clearly remember the first time I saw it on a BBC and I was staggered that such a thing could be done on any 8-bit machine, even the ridiculously expensive BBC. I never imagined it would be possible on the humble work-a-day-Spectrum. But I was wrong.

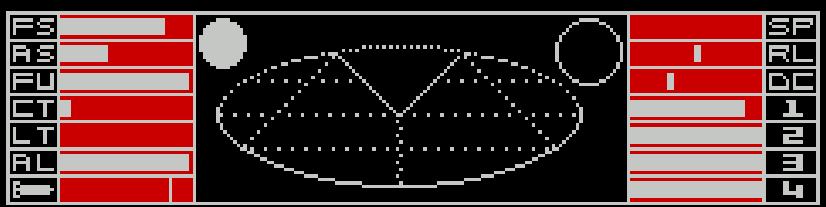
Elite was out on the BBC almost a year before it appeared on the ZX Spectrum. Someone had already become 'Elite' before we Speccie users even got into the cockpit. There was palpable demand for the game on other platforms aside from the BBC.

"I never imagined it would be possible on the humble work-a-day Spectrum"

Publishing rights were auctioned off at the end of 1984, amidst a great clamour due to the demand. British Telecom actually won the day, with their 'Firebird' software brand, and a massive six-figure sum being given jointly to Messrs Bell and Braben.

Ultimately it was Scottish developers 'Torus' (hence the Torus drive) that 'ported' Elite to the Spectrum. Strictly speaking it wasn't a port. Converting the code from the 'old' 6502 processor in the BBC to the more 'modern' Z80A was problematic. The Torus developers simply played the BBC Elite to death and wrote a version for the Spectrum which was as close as possible in terms of game-play and behaviour, no code was re-used at all except for the famous Fibonacci sequence and the galaxy seeds.

So what did we end up with? Once the five minute loading time had been dispensed with, Spectrum owners had to do battle with the Lenslok, an early copy prevention mechanism which required you to squint through a piece of prismatic folded plastic, wedged uncomfortably close to a flickering cathode ray tube television. Adjust some lines, type OK and then hope you could make out the next series of letters… if not… oblivion and another five minute load. I've met the chap responsible for the Lenslok and he's given us all his unconditional apology! (He's actually a perfectly charming fellow.)



But then, there it was. The Cobra Mk3, spinning around on screen in a way that still looks almost impossible on an 8 bit computer. It's still majestic in an 80s sort of way. A quick stop for an extra missile and most of us blasted out of Lave, hyperspaced to Riedquat and died a quick death at the hands of the first pirate we came across.

But we had Elite. At last, we had Elite. We could now face those rich kids with their BBCs with our heads held high (and those pesky C-64 owners who'd got their version a few months ahead of us with their constant blathering on about sprites and trumbles).

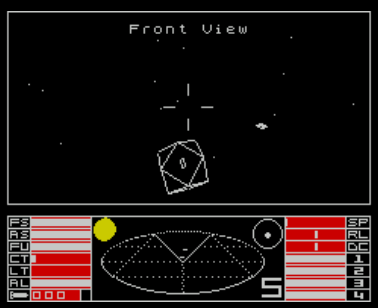
Well, almost.

The Spectrum wasn't quite sporting the hardware that the BBC brought to the battle. The sound was the most noticeable special effect that was missing in action. Whilst the BBC had a sound chip of sorts, the Spectrum, well (and let's be generous) had virtually nothing at all.

And whilst the 6502 might have been a bit venerable, it had an advantage over the Z80A: efficiency. That counted with the 3D vector graphics. The Spectrum framerate was a poor echo of the BBC's more fluid gameplay, despite it having a faster processor.

That aside the Spectrum version fought back well. The Torus drive was animated, unlike the BBC. We had a red alert light, unlike the BBC. We even had traffic around the space stations, unlike the BBC. And where the BBC had a paltry two missions for the more advanced players, the Spectrum rocked up with no less than four including a Supernova, a quest for a cloaking device (catching an Asp rather than the Constrictor) and a full scale Thargoid invasion of a space station. This was mostly down to the ingenuity of the Torus team, and the Spectrum's rather more generous 48k of RAM. Apparently David and Ian had encouraged the various porting teams to "just have your own fun" and so each version of Elite was subtly different to the previous one with respect to missions.

The onscreen display was far tidier than the BBC's ugly 'mix-mode' display, with clever use of colour throughout. The Spectrum version also had the benefit of not flickering wildly like the BBC, another benefit of having 'hi-res' graphics at all times.



Ships were despatched with a blast of ferocious red light after an intense dog-fight. Having played both versions side by side, the Spectrum has far superior 'AI' with its opponents not simply relying on overwhelming odds to defeat the player, but twisting and whirling through space in an attempt to dodge your weapons fire. They had tougher shields and knew when to use their missiles too.

The Spectrum version had most of the ships from the BBC disk version, with a few minor exceptions. One peculiarity not noticed by many was that you could have Kraits or Adders, but not at the same time. Apparently there were two versions of Elite on either side of the cassette. Depending on which you loaded, it determined which ships your universe ended up with. It was handy as the Kraits didn't have any missiles, so you could use one side of the cassette to build up enough cash to buy an ECM before facing off with the Adders.

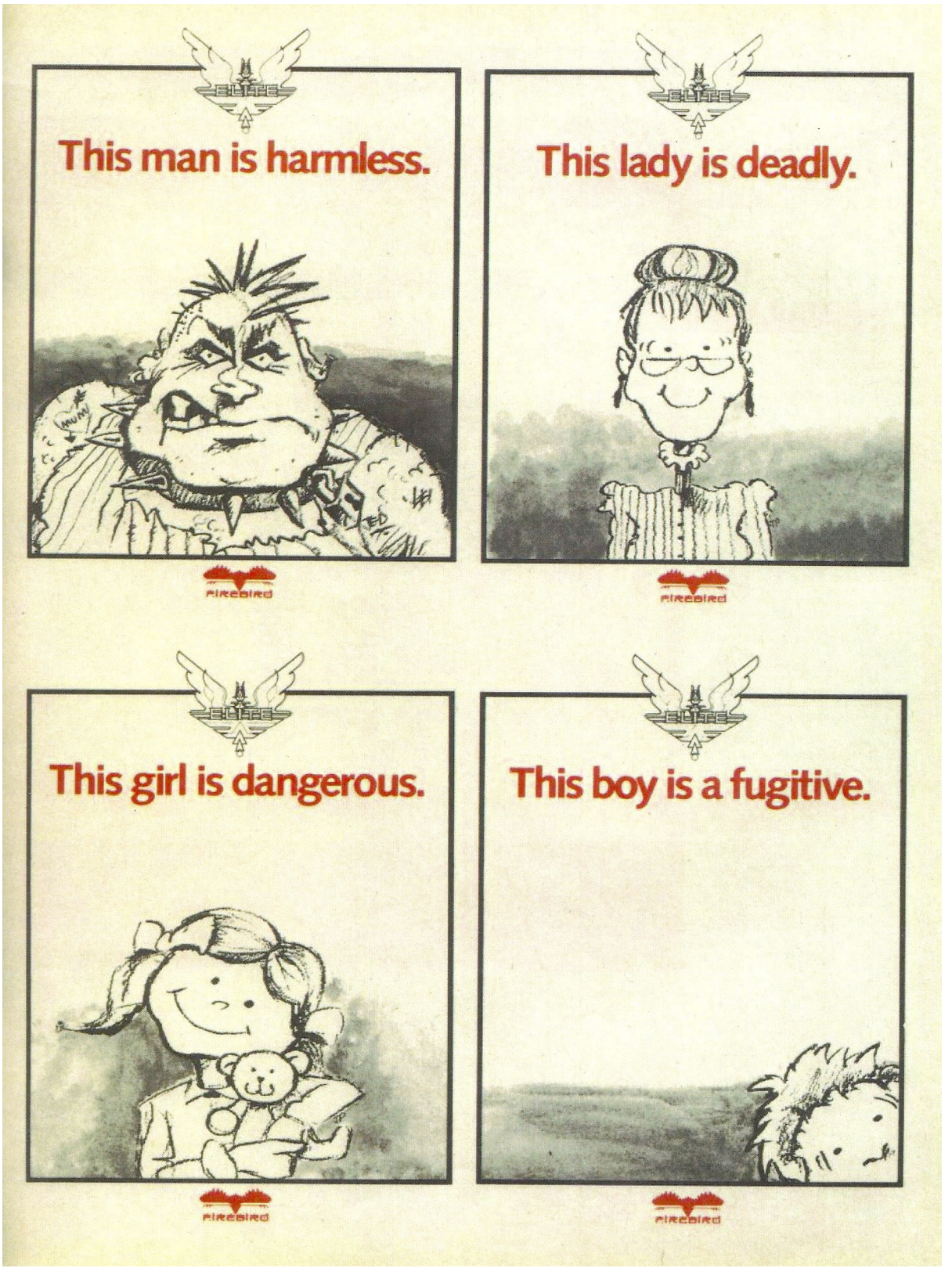
The Spectrum version also featured the Rock Hermits, which would often try to ambush you with a pair of attackers if you dared too close. The aforementioned cloaking device turned space 'blue' around you, and rendered you invisible, but at the cost of a rapid drain on your energy banks. The Thargoids were present too, lurking both in and out of witchspace, ready to unleash their remote controlled Thargons at you at a moment's notice.

Everything else was an exact copy of the BBC version, the system names, the maps, the galactic hyperspace – everything, including the race to get to Elite, after a heady 6,400 kills. I genuinely made it without cheating, did you?

Elite sold something like 600,000 copies to BBC owners. I don't have sales figures for the Spectrum, but I doubt they were far behind given the phenomenal success of the Spectrum in the home computer market, it may have even beaten the BBC in terms of Elite sales. What is without doubt is that there are many Commanders who first took to the space-lanes at the helm of a trusty Cobra Mk3 via means of a dead-flesh keyboard, a cheap cassette player and a TV pinched from their parents' bedroom.

Load ditto ditto, Commanders.

Reviewed by Elite: Reclamation author, Drew Wagar



Firebird employed some catchy magazine advertising to help promote ELITE

SPECTRUM 48K

48K CASSETTE VERSION

CONTENTS CHECKLIST:

- ☐ ZX Spectrum 48K game box
- ☐ Space Traders Flight Training Manual
- ☐ The Dark Wheel novella
- ☐ Quick Key Control Guide
- ☐ Lenslok device
- ☐ Game cassette
- ☐ Ship Identification Chart
- ☐ Keyboard overlay
- ☐ Elite membership postcard
- ☐ Lenslok Instructions for Use

SPECTRUM 48K

SPECTRUM 48K/128K

48K/128K CASSETTE VERSION

CONTENTS CHECKLIST:

- ☐ ZX Spectrum 48K/128K game box
- ☐ Space Traders Flight Training Manual
- ☐ The Dark Wheel novella
- ☐ Quick Key Control Guide
- ☐ Spectrum 48/128K game cassette
- ☐ Ship Identification Chart
- ☐ Elite membership postcard
- ☐ Keyboard overlay

SPECTRUM 48K

DISK VERSION

CONTENTS CHECKLIST:

- ☐ ZX Spectrum Opus game box
- ☐ Space Traders Flight Training Manual
- ☐ The Dark Wheel novella
- ☐ Quick Key Control Guide
- ☐ Opus Spectrum game disk
- ☐ Ship Identification Chart
- ☐ Elite membership postcard

Chapter Eleven

ELITE

Amstrad CPC

The Amstrad CPC 464 looked more like a toy with its coloured buttons. It was actually a very capable machine and the Amstrad conversion of Elite even featured solid planets.

Amstrad CPC ELITE

The Amstrad CPC is a series of 8-bit computers produced between 1984 and 1990. Its main competition was the Commodore 64 and Sinclair ZX Spectrum. Over 3 million units were reported to have been sold.

The Amstrad CPC version of ELITE was one of only two Firebird conversions known to have seen a translated release in Germany, the other being the Commodore 64 conversion.

Did you know?
'SCHNEIDER' is the German version of the Amstrad.

Cassette and Disk Versions

The Amstrad cassette release of Elite was available in both a black and white labeled version. A bug in the original black-labeled version caused the game to lock up after a few hours of play.

The fault was claimed to come from a disk drawing routine used by Torus in the Spectrum version of Elite. Firebird offered a £2 voucher and a replacement version to all owners of the bugged version who returned their copy. The replacement version had the white label and could be further distinguished by the text METROPOLITON under the AMSTRAD CPC model identifier.

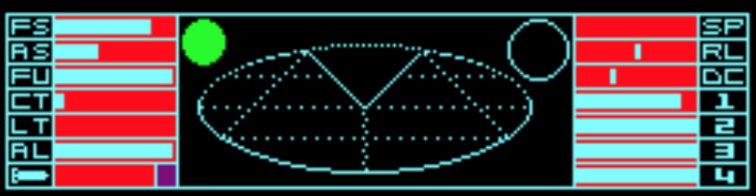
Did you know?
Firebird shipped around 15,000 cassettes for the initial release, and it is thought that around 6,000 of those had been sold by the time the bug was reported. The remaining cassettes were reportedly destroyed.

The intial Amstrad cassette release was shipped with a software bug.

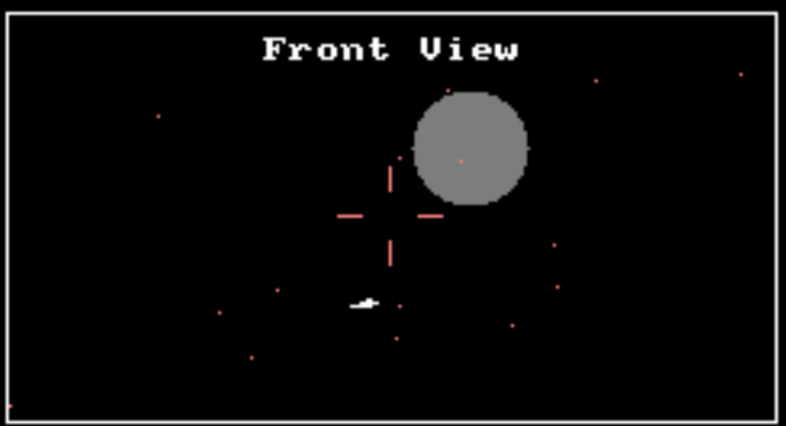
COMPUTER DATA

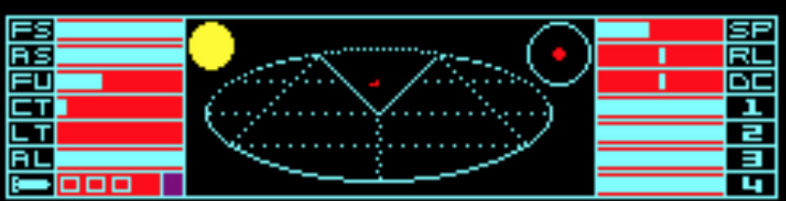
Model:	Amstrad CPC
Manufactur er:	**https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/en/4/43/Telecomsoft-firebird-software-fair-use-220px.png** Amstrad
Year Released:	1984
CPU:	Zilog Z80A
Clock:	4 MHz
Memory:	64 kB
Resolution:	640x200 / 320x200 / 160x200

Left: The Amstrad CPC loading screen.



Right: The Amstrad CPC title screen.





Left: The Amstrad CPC game play.

AMSTRAD JOINS THE ELITE!

Elite for the Amstrad was launched after the conversions for the Commodore C64 and the Sinclair ZX Spectrum were released. This meant that I had read all there was about Elite before buying it and my expectations were very high. I just had to hope that the Amstrad CPC Elite matched all the hype.

After many days of walking past my local computer shop; one Friday looking in the window there was Elite on cassette for the Amstrad CPC machines. It was months before a disk version would be released.

The first thing that hit you upon opening the box was just how much stuff the box contained! It was not often that with the game came a novel! With this and a Space Traders Flight Training

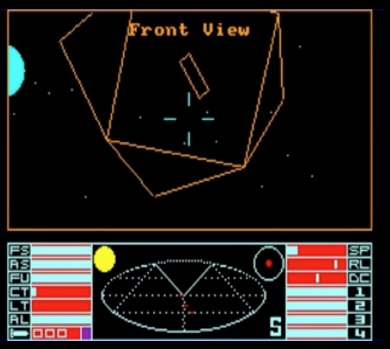
Manual, Quick Control Guide and a Ship Identification Chart, you just knew this was going to be an epic game.

This version of Elite was a port from the Sinclair ZX Spectrum version carried out by Torus. The main difference being that Amstrad version had solid coloured planets, although ships are still wire frame. Elite is much more colourful in Amstrad Elite! Also to the relief of many, it did not have Lenslok like the Spectrum version of the time did.

The game itself is difficult to play, in that there is a lot to learn and on the first few flights it's all too easy to crash into a space station when trying to dock. When you do start getting the hang of it and trade between space stations you feel like cannon fodder for any pirate that fancies an easy kill.

You smile as you see your first "Right on Commander!" You smile less when you see your first Thargoid, but the smile returns when you finally come away from a battle as the winner.

The missions in the Amstrad version are the Super Nova Mission, Cloaking Device Mission and the Thargoids have taken over a Space Station Mission.



"You smile as you see your first Right on Commander!"

After a while you make money and it is decision time, do you get the docking computer or perhaps more cargo space on your Cobra; then again wouldn't it be easier in the space lanes with a beam laser. This is when it really starts to be fun and you know it's going to take over your life for the next few months.

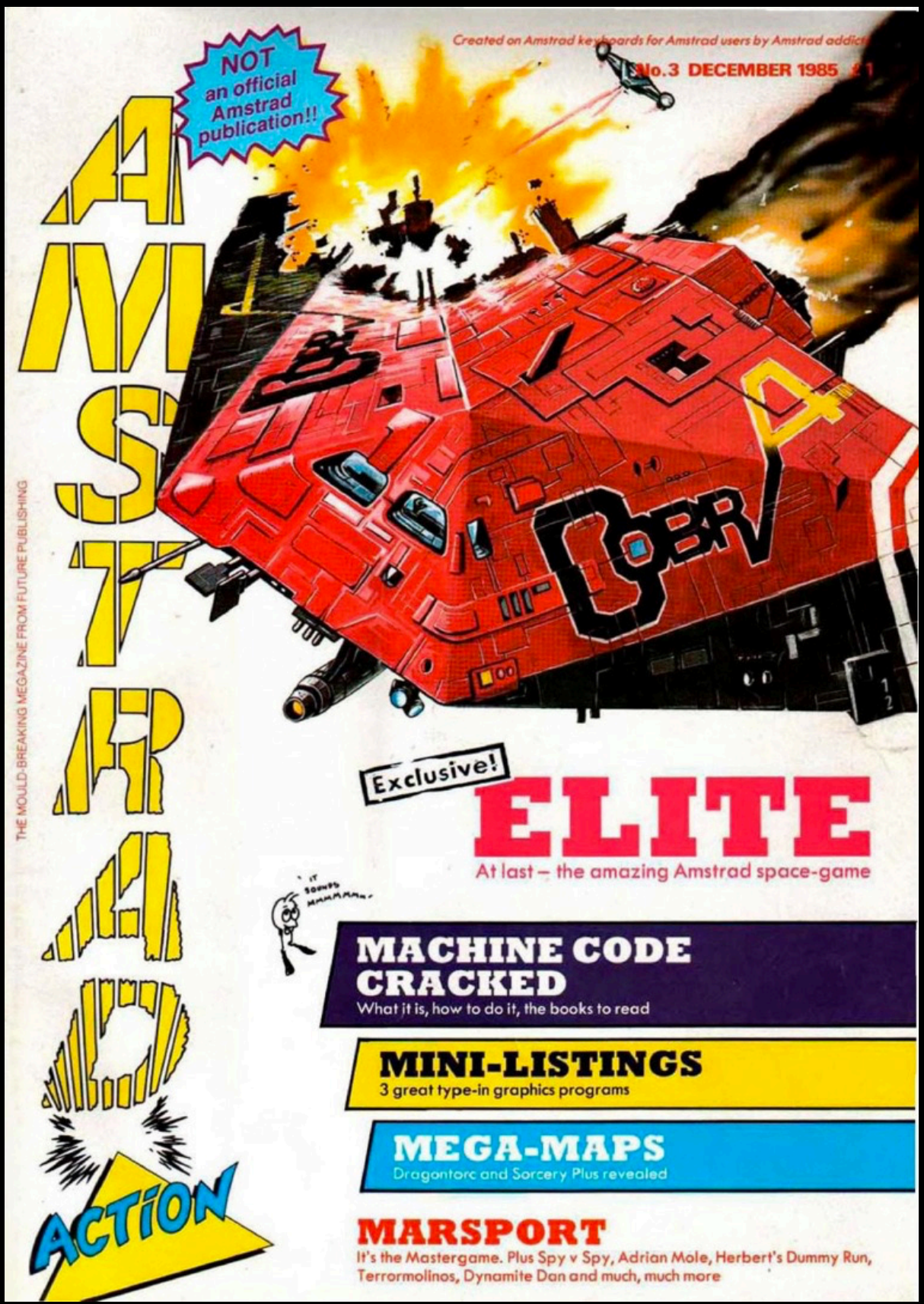
These are different to the BBC / Commodore C64 versions, but the same as the spectrum version. Like all the other versions you can be a Trader, a Pirate, a Bounty Hunter or any of the combination of the three!

So did the Amstrad version live up to its hype? Yes of course it did, it's Elite after all. I have since played many versions of Elite, but as the Amstrad CPC version was my first ever experience of Elite, it will always be special.

Reviewed by Rob Allen

AMTIX April 1986 13

This advertisement was placed in a number of computer magazines to alert Amstrad Elite users about the software bug that was present in the initial batch of cassette versions that Firebird released.



The December 1993 issue of Amstrad Action sported this fantastic Cobra Mk III on the cover. Note how the blacked out edges make the Cobra look like a Sidewinder - very sneaky!

AMSTRAD CPC

CASSETTE VERSION

CONTENTS CHECKLIST:

- ☐ Amstrad CPC cassette game box
- ☐ Space Traders Flight Training Manual
- ☐ The Dark Wheel novella
- ☐ Quick Key Control Guide
- ☐ Game cassette
- ☐ Ship Identification Chart
- ☐ Warranty card
- ☐ Registration card

AMSTRAD CPC

METROPOLITAN CASSETTE VERSION

CONTENTS CHECKLIST:

- ☐ Amstrad CPC cassette game box
- ☐ Space Traders Flight Training Manual
- ☐ The Dark Wheel novella
- ☐ Quick Key Control Guide
- ☐ “Metropoliton” game cassette
- ☐ Ship Identification Chart
- ☐ Warranty card
- ☐ Registration card

AMSTRAD CPC

DISK VERSION

CONTENTS CHECKLIST:

- ☐ Amstrad CPC disk game box
- ☐ Space Traders Flight Training Manual
- ☐ The Dark Wheel novella
- ☐ Quick Key Control Guide
- ☐ Game disk
- ☐ Ship Identification Chart
- ☐ Warranty card
- ☐ Registration card

SCHNEIDER CPC

GERMAN CASSETTE VERSION

CONTENTS CHECKLIST:

- ☐ Schneider CPC game box
- ☐ Space Traders Flight Training Manual
- ☐ The Dark Wheel novella
- ☐ Quick Key Control Guide
- ☐ Game disk or cassette
- ☐ Ship Identification Chart
- ☐ Order of Elite postcard

AMSTRAD CPC

FRENCH DISK VERSION

CONTENTS CHECKLIST:

- ☐ Amstrad CPC game box (French)
- ☐ Space Traders Flight Training Manual
- ☐ Quick Key Control Guide (not shown)
- ☐ Game disk
- ☐ Ship Identification Chart

AMSTRAD CPC

FRENCH CASSETTE VERSION

CONTENTS CHECKLIST:

- ☐ Amstrad CPC game box (French)
- ☐ Space Traders Flight Training Manual
- ☐ Quick Key Control Guide (not shown)
- ☐ Game cassette
- ☐ Ship Identification Chart (not shown)

Chapter Twelve

ELITE

Tatung Einstein

"The game has so many surprises
I haven't got room to mention them all..."

June 1987, Electron User magazine

The Tatung Einstein was designed and manufactured in England, altough the parent company, Tatung, was actually based out of Taiwan.

Tatung Einstein ELITE

The Tatung Einstein is an 8-bit home computer aimed primarily at the business sector, the Tatung Einstein was released during the summer of 1984 and comprised a base-unit with built in keyboard, and either a colour or monochrome monitor atop the base.

Unusual for its time when most home computers used tape storage, it had the option of a single or dual 3 inch disk drive. The Einstein never really took off as either a business or home computer and only a handful of games were produced for it, including of course Elite.

Although rare, this conversion was regarded as being one of the poorer ones. One of the oft-cited problems with this version is that ships do not explode once destroyed, instead they simply disappear.

Another missing 'feature' revolves around the Galcop vipers normally located at many space stations. In most conversions an attack on a space station will result in a regular series of Viper police vessels launching to defend the station. In the Einstein version the player can sit firing at the station without upsetting the authorities.

The Einstein version by Merlin Software repackaged ZX Spectrum or Amstrad boxes with the Einstein software.

COMPUTER DATA

Model:	Einstein TC-01
Manufacturer:	Tatung
Year Released:	1984
CPU:	Zilog Z80
Clock:	4 MHz
Memory:	64 kB RAM
Resolution:	256 x 192
Colours:	16
Original Price:	£499

Tatung Einstein Elite

Merlin Software were given an exclusive licence to convert Elite for use on the Tatung Einstein home computer. The game retailed for £19.95.

It's Not a Bootleg!

Although this was an official licenced conversion, the packaging could easily mislead one to believe that they had bought a pirated copy as the box was in fact a re-labeled Spectrum 48K box. Merlin Software had stickers affixed over the Spectrum 48k names on the front of the box and the side of the box. The barcode was left unchanged.

Inside the box the obvious links to Spectrum 48k version were abundantly evident. The Space Traders Flight Training Manual was the Spectrum 48k manual with a list of errata included noting the Tatung Einstein specifics, including Einstein version loading instructions. So too, the Quick Key Control Guide was from the Spectrum 48k and included a sticker alongside the Firebird logo detailing the key changes compared to the Spectrum 48k version.

The Tatung Einstein used a 3 inch floppy disk similar to the Amstrad CPC version. In this case however, rather than the proper Firebird label of the Amstrad disk, the Einstein version was simply a generic Merlin Software label affixed over the original blank disk logo. The name 'Elite' and a product code '40594' were printed onto the A-side of the disk label and the 'spine' of the disk label by a dot matrix printer prior to being affixed to the disk.

Copy Protection

The software has a very strong copy protection and to date no one has been able to produce an emulator version.

The only way to play this version is to use an original Tatung Einstein home computer along with the Tatung Einstein Elite disk.

Obtaining a copy can be difficult as this version is among the rarest and commands quite high prices when a copy becomes available for sale. It is not uncommon for Tantung Einstein versions of Elite to reach over £100 on some auction sites.

There are a number of reports where a disk image that has been circulating the internet cannot be played on an emulator, however once the image is restored to a 3-inch disk, a genuine Tatung Einstein will play it with no problems.

EINSTEIN VERSION

by MERLIN SOFTWARE
under licence

CONTENTS CHECKLIST:

- ☐ Tatung Einstein game box
- ☐ Space Traders Flight Training Manual
- ☐ The Dark Wheel novella
- ☐ Quick Key Control Guide
- ☐ Game disk
- ☐ Ship Identification Chart
- ☐ Loading instructions

Chapter Thirteen

ELITE

MSX

"...deserves a place in any MSX owner's software library."

1988, The Games Machine magazine

MSX was a standard for home computers that introdoced in 1983. Numerous manufacturers produced computers to the MSX standard, including this example by Philips.

MSX ELITE

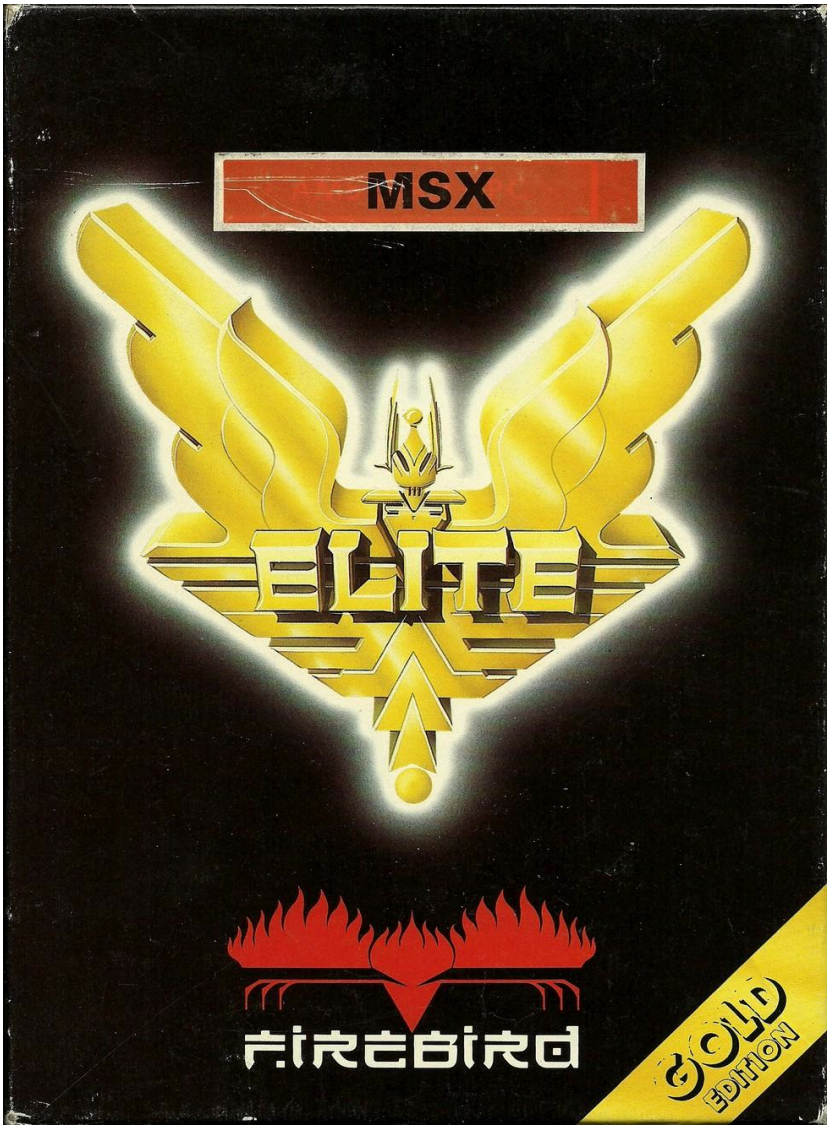
The MSX is a standardised home computer architecture introduced in 1983. The MSX computers are equipped with an 8-bit Zilog Z80 CPU and are produced by a number of different manufacturers in accordance with the MSX standard. They run an MSX-DOS operating system with earlier models typically fitted with 8 to 32 kB of RAM depending on the model.

The MSX conversion of Elite was released in 1987 on cassette and disk. The port was completed by Rob Nicholson from Mr. Micro Ltd. and the game was published by Firebird. The port was made for the older MSX 1 standard, even though the MSX 2 standard was around one year old by that point.

The box that the MSX version came in was not printed specially for this version, instead other versions such as the Amstrad CPC or ZX Spectrum boxes were used, and an “MSX” sticker was placed over the original machine’s name. A sticker denoting cassette or disk was also placed over the box’s original barcode.

The disk and cassette are unique to the MSX version, as are the Space Traders Flight Trading Manual and Quick Key Control Guide.

The cassette version has fewer ships than the disk version, although unlike the BBC Microcomputer cassette version, the MSX cassette version still featured the iconic Fer de Lance. The manual only detailed the ships for the cassette version of the game.



The MSX conversion used ‘recycled’ Amstrad or ZX Spectrum packaging with the ‘MSX’ label applied over the original name.

COMPUTER DATA

Model:	MSX
Manufacturer:	Various
Year Released:	1984
CPU:	Zilog Z80A
Clock:	3.58 MHz
Memory:	32 kB RAM
Resolution:	256 x 192
Colours:	16
Original Price:	£399

MSX ELITE

The disk version featured some additional ships not seen on the original BBC Microcomputer version including the Wolf Mk II and the Cougar.

Unlike the original BBC Microcomputer version, the MSX conversion features a coloured combat screen with yellow suns and a green pulse laser reticule. The menu systems also utilise multicolour text rather than the traditional white.

Above: No white dwarf stars here, the suns all blaze yellow on the MSX

Gameplay

The MSX conversion has four missions including the Constrictor mission where you are required to find and destroy a prototype navy ship; the Thargoid document mission where you are asked by the navy to transport Thargoid ship blueprints to a navy base; the supernova mission where you must help evacuate people from a planet whose sun is going supernova; and the Thargoid invasion mission where you must destroy a space station in a system that has been invaded by the Thargoids.

There is a special event that some consider a mission. This involves a ship known as the Cougar that will attack you after emerging from hyperspace at a certain point in the game.

This ship was undoubtedly one of the great legends from some versions of the original Elite.

The Cougar is equipped with a cloaking device that prevents the ships scanners from detecting it on the radar, as well making it invisible to the pilot's eyes.

Once the ship is destroyed, a cargo canister containing the cloaking device can be scooped from the wreckage.

Above: The title screen was less impressive than some conversions

Right: The MSX conversion made good use of the 16-colour palette

MSX

DISK VERSION*

CONTENTS CHECKLIST:

- ☐ MSX game box
- ☐ Space Traders Flight Training Manual
- ☐ The Dark Wheel novella
- ☐ MSX Quick Key Control Guide
- ☐ MSX game disk*
- ☐ Ship Identification Chart

* Note: The MSX conversion was also available in cassette format.

Author's Acknowledgement: Special thanks to Steve from FrontierAstro.co.uk for providing scans of his MSX Elite for use in our book

Chapter Fourteen

ELITE

IBM / Tandy PC

"...everything is presented in solid, shaded 3D"

1988, The Games Machine magazine

The above computer is an example of the type of IBM machine that was capable of playing the IBM/Tandy PC version of Elite. Note the 5 1/4" floppy disk drive in use at the time.

IBM/Tandy ELITE

The IBM/Tandy PC conversion was packaged in a Firebird box that was ‘donated’ from either Spectrum or Amstrad versions.

Stickers were applied to the box front, and on the barcode and the screenshot on the back of the box.

Inside, the flight manual had undergone an extensive re-write to accommodate screenshots of the new solid polygon graphics.

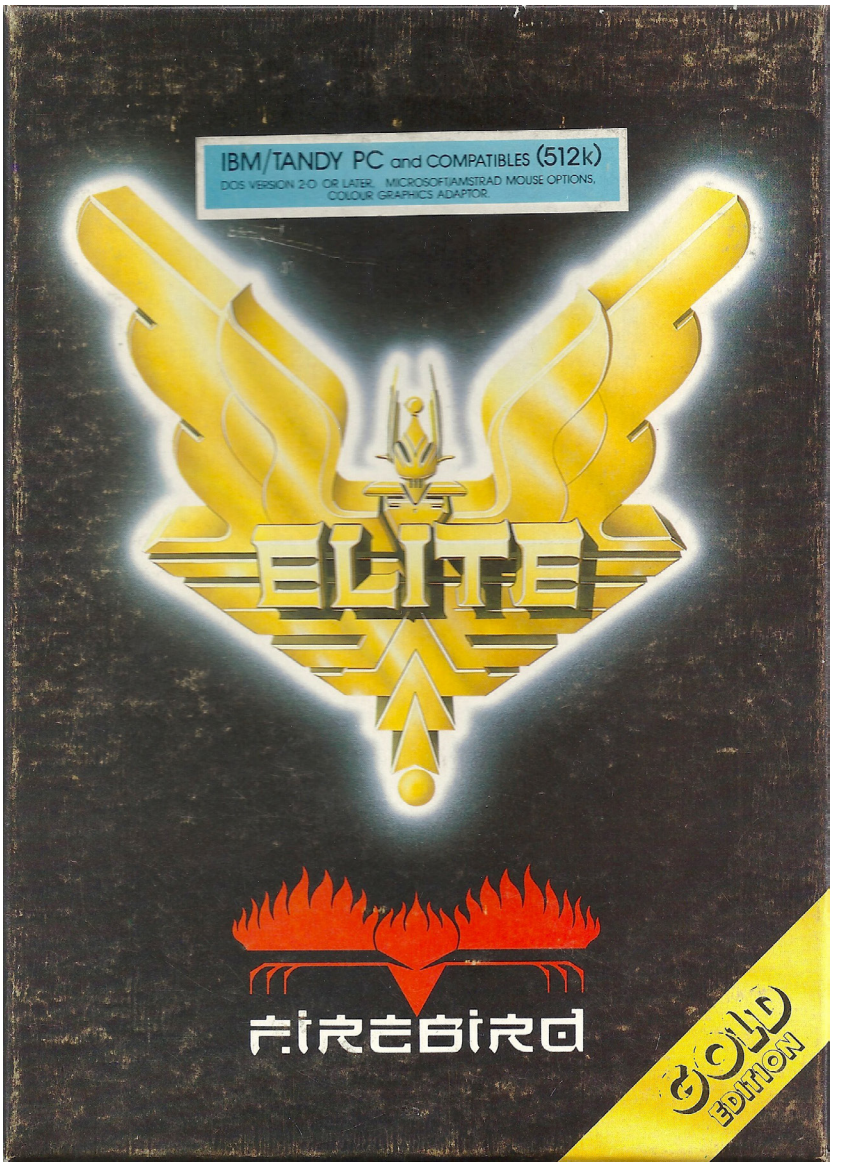
This version was only ever available on 5 1/4” floppy disk.

It also saw a later release featuring the white cover manual and guide inline with the Firebird Amiga and Atari ST conver

Gameplay

The IBM/Tandy conversion of Elite featured solid 3D graphics, although the colour pallete was not particularly appealing to many.

An unneccesary border was implemented around the normal view screen area which seemed to constrain the viewing area for no reason other than to allow the 3D polygons to be shaded without unduly compramising machine performance (due to a greater display area).



The first PC version of Elite was released by Firebird.

COMPUTER DATA

Model:	PC
Manufacturer:	IBM
Year Released:	1984
CPU:	Intel 80286
Clock:	6 MHz
Memory:	256 kB RAM
Resolution:	320 x 200 (CGA)
Colours:	4

IBM/TANDY PC and COMPATIBLES (512K)

CONTENTS CHECKLIST:

- ☐ IBM/Tandy PC game box
- ☐ Space Traders Flight Training Manual
- ☐ The Dark Wheel novella
- ☐ Quick Key Control Guide
- ☐ 5.25” game disk
- ☐ Ship Identification Chart
- ☐ Warranty card
- ☐ Registration card

IBM 5.25

CONTENTS CHECKLIST:

- ☐ IBM 5.25 game box
- ☐ Space Traders Flight Training Manual
- ☐ Quick Key Control Guide
- ☐ IBM 5.25” game disk

Chapter Fifteen

The Superior Years

"ELITE takes off again!"

1986, Electron User magazine issue 4.05

Superior Software's logo at the time it released Elite

Superior Software Limited is a video game publishing company that was established in the UK by Richard Hanson and John Dyson in 1982.

During the ‘80s and early ‘90s Superior Software produced a number of games primarily for the Acorn and BBC series of computers.

Towards the end of 1985, Superior Software bought Acornsoft, and along with its own famous Repton series of games featuring an anthropomorphic lizard, Superior Software also released in 1986 a number of Elite conversions co-branded as Superior Software / Acornsoft releases.

Repton title screen.

In total, Superior Software released four Elite conversions, including the previously released BBC Micro, Acorn Electron and Master 128, as well as a new Master Compact conversion. Each was packaged in a hard black plastic clamshell type case and once more featured Philip Castle’s Elite artwork on the cover.

The game box contents were significantly reduced compared to the original Acornsoft releases and only included the game cassette or disk, a keyboard overlay and the Space Trader’s Flight Training Manual (which also included the ship ID chart and control summary in the back few pages).

Prices started from £12.95 for the Acorn Electron version going up to £19.95 for the Master Compact version.

The BBC Master Compact conversion included new missions and additional sound effects (which were not generally favoured over the original) along with graphics that delivered improvements in both speed and quality.

Elite advertisement from Electron User Magazine 4.05 (October 1986)

Acorn Electron Cassette £12.95 Barcode: 5013848001059 CAT: 00105	BBC Micro and Master Series 5 1/4” Disc £14.95 Barcode: 5013848100974 CAT: 10097
BBC Micro Cassette £12.95 Barcode: 5013848000977 CAT: 00097	BBC Master Compact 3 1/2” Compact Disc £19.95 Barcode: 5013848200971 CAT: 20097

ELECTRON

Cassette

CONTENTS CHECKLIST:

- ☐ Acorn Electron cassette game box
- ☐ Space Trader's Flight Training Manual
- ☐ Acorn Electron game cassette
- ☐ Acorn Electron keyboard overlay

BBC MICRO

Cassette

CONTENTS CHECKLIST:

- ☐ BBC Micro cassette game box
- ☐ Space Trader's Flight Training Manual
- ☐ BBC Micro game cassette
- ☐ BBC Micro keyboard overlay

BBC MICRO and MASTER SERIES

5 1/4 “ Disc

CONTENTS CHECKLIST:

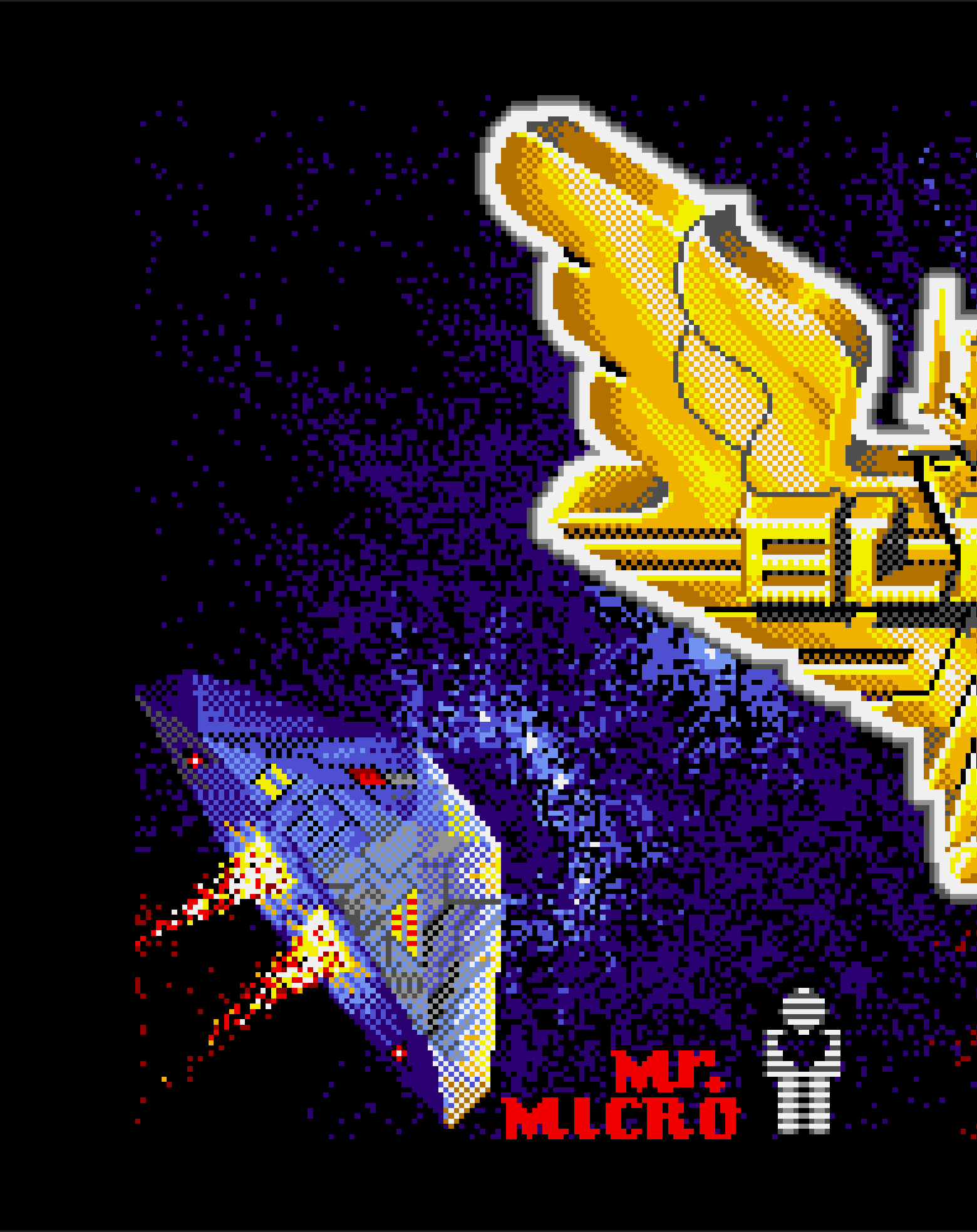
- ☐ BBC Micro/Master game box
- ☐ Space Trader’s Flight Training Manual
- ☐ BBC Micro/Master game disk
- ☐ BBC Micro/Master keyboard overlay

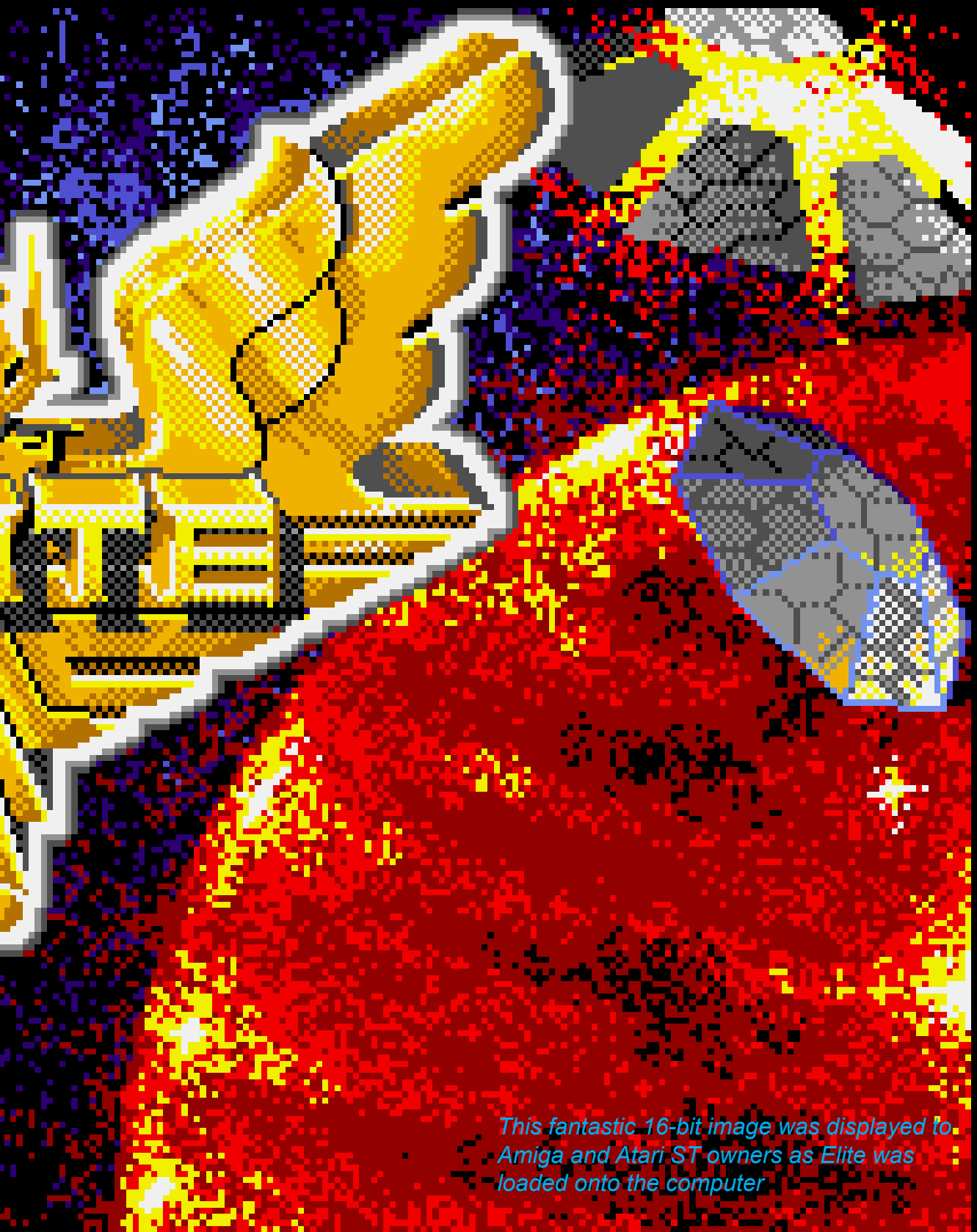
BBC Master Compact

3 1/2 “ Compact Disc

CONTENTS CHECKLIST:

- ☐ BBC Master Compact game box
- ☐ Space Trader’s Flight Training Manual
- ☐ BBC Master Compact game disk
- ☐ BBC Master Compact keyboard overlay


Mr.
MICRO



This fantastic 16-bit image was displayed to Amiga and Atari ST owners as Elite was loaded onto the computer

Chapter Sixteen

ELITE

Commodore Amiga

"Amiga Elite is the best yet."

February 1989, Jon Revis, Amiga Computing magazine

The Amiga 500 (pictured) was the machine of choice for most Amiga Elite players, although the game would run on many other versions including the A1200, and the destop style Amiga 4000.

ELITE: In living Colour!

Reviewed by Dave Hughes, author of the ELITE: ENCOUNTERS RPG

Just about everyone who's into computers will remember Elite: it was the first game to give the player a choice in how to play the game, and it did away with the "three lives" convention, turning the gaming world on its head. Words like "revolutionary", "game-changing" and "innovative" were thrown around like snowballs on an ice world.

From its humble beginnings on the BBC Model B, Elite was ported to just about every home computer around. I remember vividly the day I was handed a cassette tape and told "play this: you won't believe it". Well, that tape was the start of a digital love affair that continues to this day.

When the Amiga came out I was keen to upgrade from my beloved but flaky Spectrum and discover the wonder of the "floppy disk". Loading times of less than a minute? Yes please! No need to worry about the game not loading then having to twiddle a screw and try again? Where do I sign up?

My first impression of the game was limited to the manual and the box contents. The box contained the same game and novella that had graced the original, but with updated images inside showing the Amiga (or Atari ST) graphics. The manual and novella were (and still are) almost unique in gaming history as being the first truly immersive play guides provided with a game. The manual in particular was written to be an "in-universe" guide to your brand new ship and the universe in which you would be flying it. Inside its cover was a message congratulating you on becoming a pilot and buying your brand new Cobra Mk III. The remainder of the book showed you what that ship could do and what your role in the galaxy might be: trader, assassin, bounty hunter… the choice was YOURS!

"trader, assassin, bounty hunter… the choice was YOURS!"

OK, I need to review this game as if I'm not the Elite-hardened fanboy that I am. I need to discard my familiarity with the Spectrum version and look at this with fresh eyes.

At its core Elite is a space trading and combat simulation game. The player takes the role of a freshly qualified pilot with a brand new ship and 100 credits to spend. From there Elite diverts from the traditional model of most games and gives the player the freedom to choose the next step.

The galaxy is populated with traders, pirates, bounty hunters and other mercenary types and the player can take on any of those roles.

There are no missions in Elite and no set path to follow. No story, no end-of-level boss (no levels, in fact). All the player has is a spaceship, 2,000 planets to visit across eight maps, cargo to carry and a bunch of upgraded equipment to fit to that ship.

Left: Amiga Elite was converted by Mr. Micro

Amiga screenshots provided courtesy of Dave Hughes

The first few hours of gameplay will usually follow the same pattern. Use that 100 credits to buy some cargo and sell it for a profit at another planet. Rinse and repeat until you've earned enough credits to upgrade the ship. Then decisions need to be made. Does one buy a big laser and start a life of combat, seeking out bad guys and pirates and taking them down for money? Does one buy a bigger cargo hold and fill the ship with even more cargo, taking on the life of a freighter pilot?

So why is it called ELITE? Every pilot has a combat rating, and it is a scale of how many kills the player has made. The ranking increases from Harmless through Mostly Harmless, Poor, Competent and so on up to the lofty status of Elite. In the game's lore the Elite are held in high esteem and have their own organisations and secret societies.

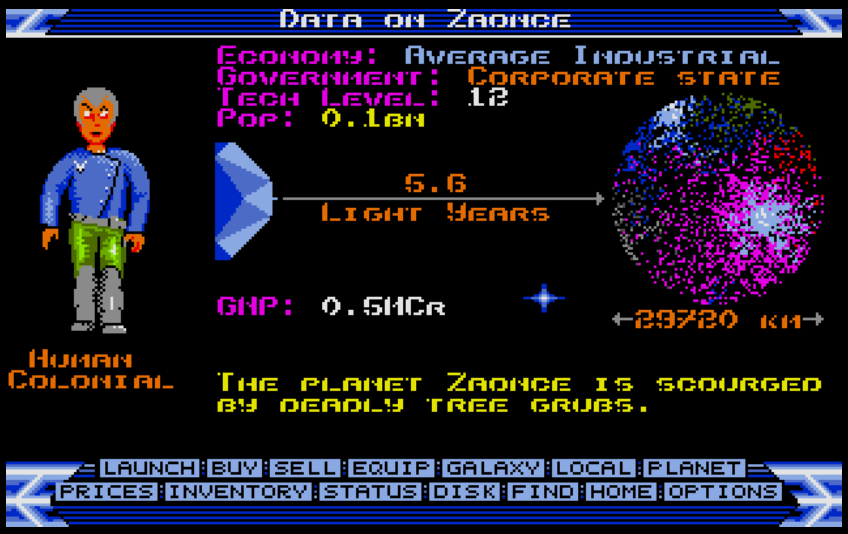
From the get-go, the presentation of Elite on the Amiga looks very nice. The loading screen is a pixelated action scene that is head and shoulders above the Spectrum's solitary, lonely "Elite" logo (apparently called a "griffin")

Loading universe…

From there the first negative aspect of the Amiga version appears. I had seen the black and white version of the user interface in the manual but it hadn't prepared me for the horrific reality of what Mr. Micro had done to the original clean interface of the 8-bit versions. For some reason it had been necessary to add a truly hideous blue and green frame around the gameplay area. I can understand why – make the main screen smaller so that less rendering has to be done on screen, and instead of having a boring black or grey backdrop have a nicely drawn cockpit surround – but it comes across as garish. The interface is predominantly blue, green and magenta – colours that years of Spectrum gaming experience has taught me is colour clash territory.

Above: I'm definitely firing the interior designer.

The presentation of the user screens is very nice. The Amiga version retains all the same keyboard commands as the 8-bit versions (oh so many keyboard commands!), but does add a handy menu at the bottom of the screens for use with the mouse.

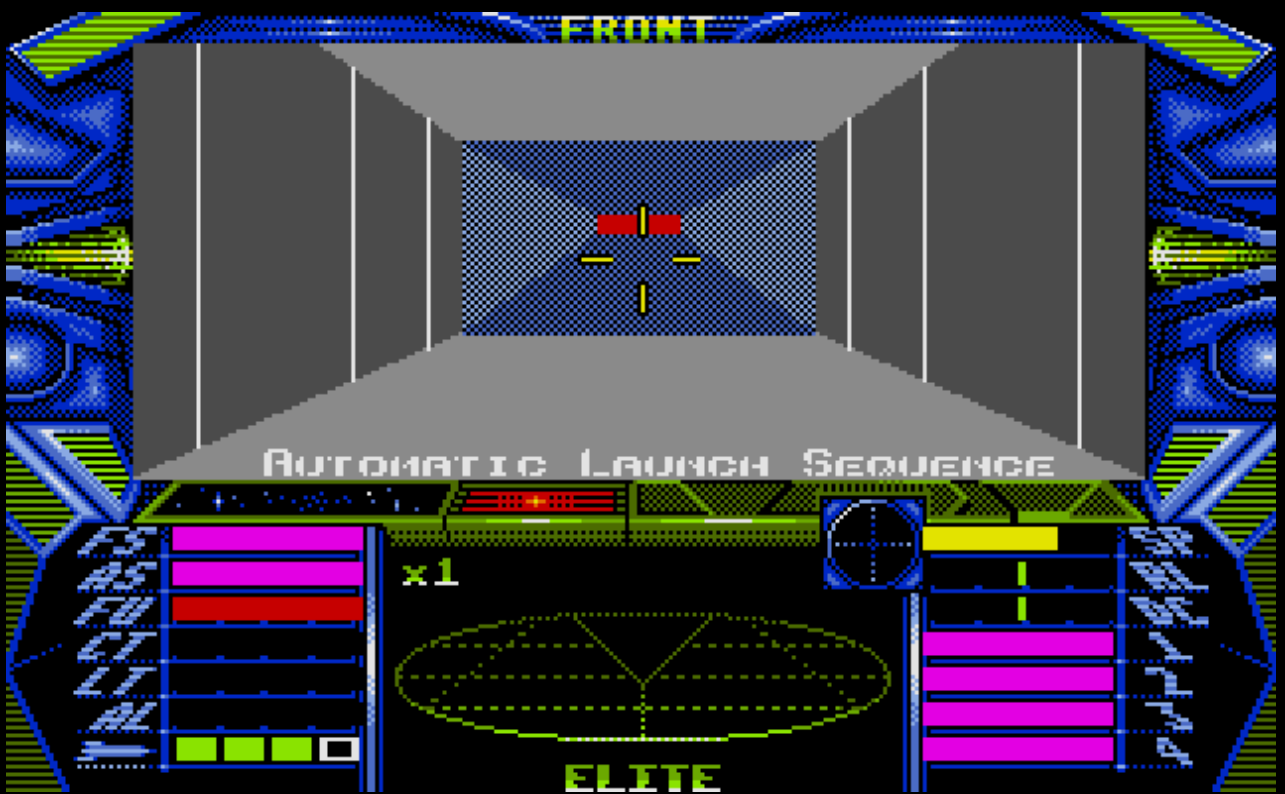


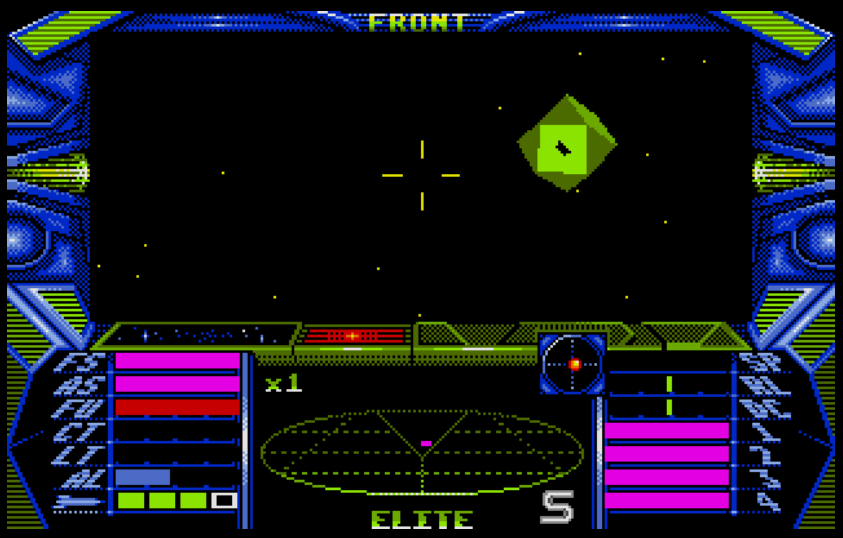
Above: His blue trousers were obviously in the wash.

I know I said I wouldn't compare the older versions of Elite with this one, but one comparison does stand out. The user interface has had a substantial makeover from the 8-bit versions. Now every screen has images of what you are looking at rather than the comparatively empty black and white text screens from previous eras. Particularly interesting is the planet info screen, which shows a drawing of the planet itself as well as its primary inhabitant. What's impressive about this is the detail to which the designers have gone to provide a wide variety of designs for these inhabitants. Even the Human Colonials have a variety of looks, from different clothes to skin colour and cybernetic implants! To be honest, the depth of the detail in the planet info screens is one of the high points of the game. The economy, government and tech levels are still there from the original game, but the planet drawing, its diameter and the population drawings just bring the galaxy to life on another level. The equipment and trade screens also have detailed drawings of the items and cargo available, making the detail nerd in me jump up and down in happiness.

What about space then? The launch sequence is quite nice, giving you a pilot's eye view as the ship lifts off from a landing bay and exits through the docking port, complete with engine noise and the appearance of the planet on

Below: See that splat mark above the dock? That was the last guy who tried this on manual…





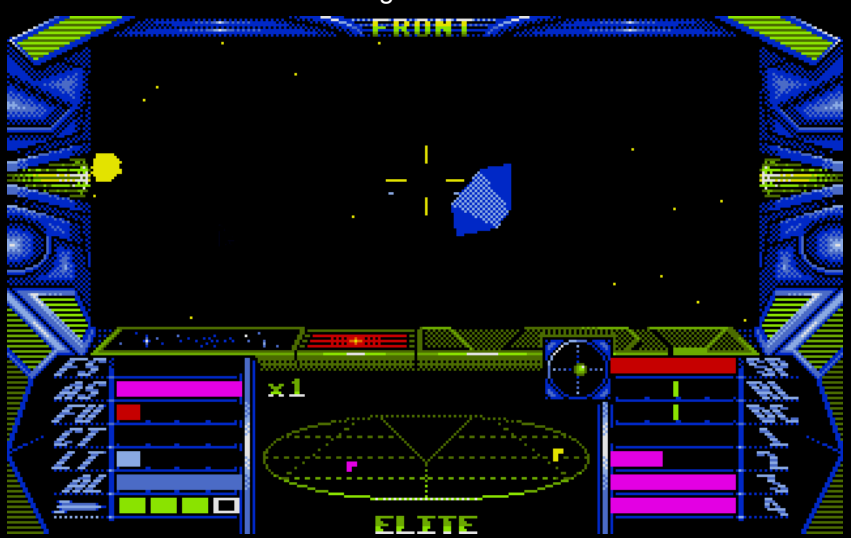
Right: The coriolis stations are reminiscent of the old green screen displays!

screen as the ship exits the station. Sometimes other ships are visible in the bay as well. Just another layer of “realism” to add to this game’s collection.

The handling of the ship is a simple roll/pitch combination. Left and right controls roll the ship around in the same way as aircraft roll around, and the up and down controls tilt the nose up and down. The motion is smooth and flowing with little on the screen but can get a little jerky with lots of other ships around.

“The user interface has had a substantial makeover from the 8-bit versions.”

After launching the player must target another planet, use the hyperdrive to travel there and then hit the thrusters and travel to the planet. A jump drive that accelerates the ship is available to shorten that journey but if another ship or an asteroid come into range then the jump drive will cut out until that object has been cleared. It’s a very clever mechanic, making the trip much quicker in some cases and preventing us players getting a little bored looking at stars flashing by. Sometimes, however, those random ships can be hostile and will start shooting at you. Now you have to shoot back and stop them nicking your cargo!



The ship can be controlled with the mouse rather than just keyboard or joystick, but the experience of mouse control is not pleasant. The responsiveness is good enough but it’s too easy to lose control of exactly where your mouse control is as you are wheeling and spinning around. Some kind of visual indicator of the mouse position relative to straight and level would have helped with making mouse control usable.

Combat in the game is really quite entertaining. It’s fast, exciting and can be quite a challenge depending on the particular kind of ship that you have encountered. One nice touch that the designers added was an increase in the amount of ships that can pop into your space as your combat rating increases, meaning that as the player increases in skill the game keeps things interesting by upping the difficulty. A nice touch that keeps the immersion whilst allowing a sliding difficulty scale. For some reason the lasers fire bolts rather than beams and they sound like small calibre firearms!

Out of my way, please, I gotta get these pineapples to Hawaii!

I don't know why this was changed, but even when the weapons are upgraded to beam lasers they still fire those little bolts. Enemy ships fire big red balls. I'm not even going to go into what reasons could be behind that. I just couldn't help singing "Great Balls of Fire" in my head during every fight!

Elite does throw some surprises at the player along the way. Out of nowhere, occasionally the ship will "misjump" and emerge in empty space. Well, I say empty – it contains one thing: a Thargoid warship. In the game's universe the Thargoids are a mysterious alien race that don't like puny humans very much and will take any opportunity to blow us out of the stars. In game the Thargoid warship is the most difficult enemy. Not only do they pack a fair punch, but if they last long enough in a fight against you (which they definitely will to start with) then they launch a dozen or so little remote fighter craft that nip at you with their tiny lasers whilst their mummy beats you with a laser-shaped rolling pin.

Elite is an addictive game. Although the premise is quite simple and may seem repetitive (buy goods, travel to planet and sell goods, repeat) the random encounters and the jump drive prevent the journeys becoming boring and the immersiveness of the UI screens make even the simple aspects of the game interesting.

The journey towards becoming Elite is as interesting as the player wants to make it. There's complete freedom in what you do in this game. If you just want to visit each planet without trading or fighting then you can do that (although the pirates might have a different opinion). You can spend three weeks trading, then three weeks as a bounty hunter if you like. Nothing in the game will stop you from doing that. My only advice would be that no matter what career you opt for, pack a decent size laser.

It's that open-ended nature that still makes Elite as attractive as it was in 1984 when it hit the 8-bit computers. The developers could have changed the game a great deal, but it's a testament to their confidence in the game in this new 16-bit market that they left the core gameplay alone and limited themselves to just filling out the ships and using the new graphics capabilities to make the rather plain information screens stand out. Some colour choices should perhaps be looked at (PINK Thargoids?) but otherwise it's a sound conversion.

"I just couldn't help singing "Great Balls of Fire" in my head during every fight!"

Surprisingly, Elite fares just as well on today's computers as it did five years ago. I think the 16-bit world will love it just as much as the 8-bit world still loves it.

Now where did I put my RemLok?

COMMODORE AMIGA

"WHITE LABEL" RAINBIRD VERSION

CONTENTS CHECKLIST:

- ☐ Amiga game box
- ☐ Space Traders Flight Training Manual
- ☐ Quick Key Control Guide
- ☐ Amiga game disk

AMIGA
All Models

CONTENTS CHECKLIST:

- ☐ Amiga game box
- ☐ Space Traders Flight Training Manual
- ☐ Quick Key Control Guide
- ☐ Amiga game disk

AMIGA
All Models

GERMAN DISK VERSION

CONTENTS CHECKLIST:

- ☐ Amiga game box
- ☐ Space Traders Flight Training Manual
- ☐ Quick Key Control Guide
- ☐ Amiga game disk

ELITE PLUS
COMMODORE AMIGA

Elite Plus for the Amiga was released by Microprose in 1993.
It is identical to the Amiga version of Elite. The name was changed to match the updated version of Elite (named Elite Plus) for the PC.

CONTENTS CHECKLIST:

☐ Amiga game box
☐ Amiga game disk
☐ Game manual

Chapter Seventeen

ELITE

Atari ST

"A fantastic voyage of discovery and adventure"

1988, Elite game box (ATARI ST)

Perhaps less popular than the Amiga version, Atari ELITE was easily as good in terms of quality and game-play. The Atari ST series of computers (520ST pictured) were a solid and reliable machine.

ATARI ST ELITE

The Atari ST series of computers were produced by the Atari Corporation between 1985 and 1993. The first model, the Atari 520ST, was released in June 1985 and featured a Motorola 68000 CPU running 512 kB of RAM. It had a 16-bit internal bus and 32-bit external bus from which the ST (sixteen/thirty-two) was derived. The 520 ST was configured as an integrated keyboard, motherboard and floppy disk drive like many other home computers from that era. The 1040ST was released in 1986 and was the first home computer to come from the manufacturer fitted with 1Mb of RAM.

The Atari ST version of ELITE was programmed by Mr Micro and was published in 1988 by Firebird in the UK and by Rainbird in the USA. The UK price on release was £24.95.

Packaging

The UK version of Atari Elite was released by Firebird in 1988. Although the Elite logo on the box was visually similar to their 8-bit releases, the box construction was different. The 8-bit versions were packaged in a solid clamshell design box, the 16-bit versions were packaged in a box made of far thinner cardboard that opened at the top and bottom. The boxes are the same for both the Atari and Amiga versions and have a sticker applied to identify the version.

British Telecommunications also released the Atari version in the UK and USA under their Rainbird label, this time in two distinct packaging styles. Once again the Elite logo was redone, this time producing a far less appealing result than Firebird's previous airbrushed Elite logo. The USA box was slightly larger in size than the UK version.

All versions contained a 3.5" floppy game disk, Space Traders Flight Training Manual, and the Quick Key Control Guide. Both the manual and guide were the same for both the Atari and Amiga versions. The manual had been updated with 16-bit screenshots and graphics replacing the previous 8-bit graphics. There were no novellas or ship ID charts included with any of these versions.

ELITE on the ATARI ST

Off the kitchen at # 4 Koromiko Ave was the laundry, which then lead to the computer room. An Atari ST 520, with extra RAM to make it 1024kB. Two screens – an Atari branded monochrome and a 14" Phillips TV decked out in 80's black as the colour screen. Together they sat proudly above the computer on a seasick green computer desk made from custom wood.

Why do I remember all these details? Because I spent so many hours in there playing Elite. . .

Elite was a revelation when it arrived on the BBC Micro in 1984 – open ended game play, only a single life, the option to choose what you did and when you did it – that it's no surprise it was ported to the Atari ST (By Mr Micro, published by Firebird in 1988), which all discerning gamers owned.

The Atari ST version of Elite was just a simple port, however using the more advanced graphics capability of the 68000 processor, this new version of Elite dropped you into a new visual world of space travel. . .

There I was, a young seven year old playing Elite until the computer literally started smoking (that upgraded RAM…). All these years later, I turn the game on, the splash screen sits there for several moments, and then the blue danube starts up in its beepy mono glory.

I watch the Cobra Mk III fly toward me, blue on blue, pulsing red engines, and my chest swells. Is that a tear in my eye? Lord no, of course not, but nor can I speak for several moments, the wave of nostalgia so thick I daren't to breathe. It instantly transports me back to another time, a time where dream of space travel, of being my own man could come true. But what is the game really like with the rose-tinted glasses off?

Gameplay wise, the Atari ST version plays like any other of the standard ports. You start docked in a space station above Lave, home of the infamous pilot academy. You fly across the eight galactic maps, gaining money and 'Elite' ranking.

The game play is simple. It's easy enough to get into the game but the breadth of the galaxy is large enough to keep you playing, exploring all the corners of the maps to see if there is something different out there. And although that by itself was some kind of awesome, I will always remember MY Elite for the moments brought about from the combination of the 68000 processor and the genius of Braben and Bell.

"this new version of Elite dropped you into a new visual world of space travel. . ."

Once the game loaded it would cycle through rotating images of each game space craft. Every time I played I had to wait for the Cobra to disappear, along with the Adder, so I could see the Thargoid. Was it green or pink? Green meant the Thargoids wouldn't be too tough; Pink meant I'd be in for a hard game, hard enough to warrant restarting the computer depending on my mood. Every hyperspace jump was a study in focus, counting the beautifully coloured rings of faster than light travel. Was it thirty or thirty one rings? Thirty

"In its day it was brilliant, a game like no other with immersion the stuff of boyhood dreams."

one meant I was about to get trapped in Witchspace, something I never survived until I could afford a military laser.

Perhaps the one moment that defined Elite for me, above all others, was the docking procedure. Not the Danube, not the docking throat, but that last moment, when the red doors opened in the parking bay, and there were other ships, parked up, engines off, going about their own business not even knowing I was alive.

THAT was the depth of Elite. I was not the central character. I was a drop in the ocean. One of many, just a man trying to make a living in an extremely harsh galaxy.

Details, details, details. The Equipment Stock page (visible when docked) was a story it itself, each piece of kit intricately drawn, and you could imagine each of those plugged in or thrown onto your own Cobra Mk III. The Status details, the sound and visual effects of guns and missiles, and who could forget the Wolf Mk II. This was the ship that scared me. Forget the Thargoids. They were easy; point and shoot. The Wolf though. . . damn. Too small to shoot unless it was right on you, too maneuverable to shoot if it was right on you and nearly as tough as a Thargoid.

Back in 1988 the game delivered more than what it should have. It delivered each childhood pilot a backstory and a future amongst the stars, using nothing but a Fibonacci sequence and a few bytes of code. Some game play balancing could have fine-tuned

the game and the cursor (or was it the Atari mouse?) made some frustration.

The limitations are more obvious now. The music is great for nostalgia but not for immersion. And what is the deal with that random

blue and green border around the screen? The graphics would bore any seven year old these days, and you are still your ship. You can't change it, you are it, almost like a Culture ship from Iain Bank's novels.

In its day it was brilliant, a game like no other with immersion the stuff of boyhood dreams. Today it still holds relevance as part of our past, but like the Atari ST it has had its day.

1988 rating: 88/100
2015 rating: 55/100

Reviewed by John Harper,

Author of the official Elite: Dangerous novel: "And Here the Wheel"

Atari STE Compatible

"WHITE LABEL" RAINBIRD VERSION

CONTENTS CHECKLIST:

- ☐ Atari ST game box
- ☐ Space Traders Flight Training Manual
- ☐ Quick Key Control Guide
- ☐ Atari ST game disk

ATARI ST
Colour Machines Only

"BLUE LABEL" VERSION

CONTENTS CHECKLIST:

- ☐ Atari ST game box
- ☐ Space Traders Flight Training Manual
- ☐ Quick Key Control Guide
- ☐ Atari ST game disk

ATARI ST

“WHITE LABEL” VERSION

CONTENTS CHECKLIST:

- ☐ Atari ST game box
- ☐ Space Traders Flight Training Manual
- ☐ Quick Key Control Guide
- ☐ Atari ST game disk

ATARI ST
Colour Machines Only

USA VERSION

CONTENTS CHECKLIST:

- ☐ Atari ST game box
- ☐ Space Traders Flight Training Manual
- ☐ Quick Key Control Guide
- ☐ Atari ST game disk

Chapter Eighteen

ELITE

Nintendo NES

"A classic computer game makes the transition to the NES perfectly!"

1991, Nintendo Magazine System

The Nintendo Entertainment System (NES) (pictured) is often hailed as the saviour of the video game industry following the late 80s crash. It also became the first console to host a port of any of the ELITE series of games.

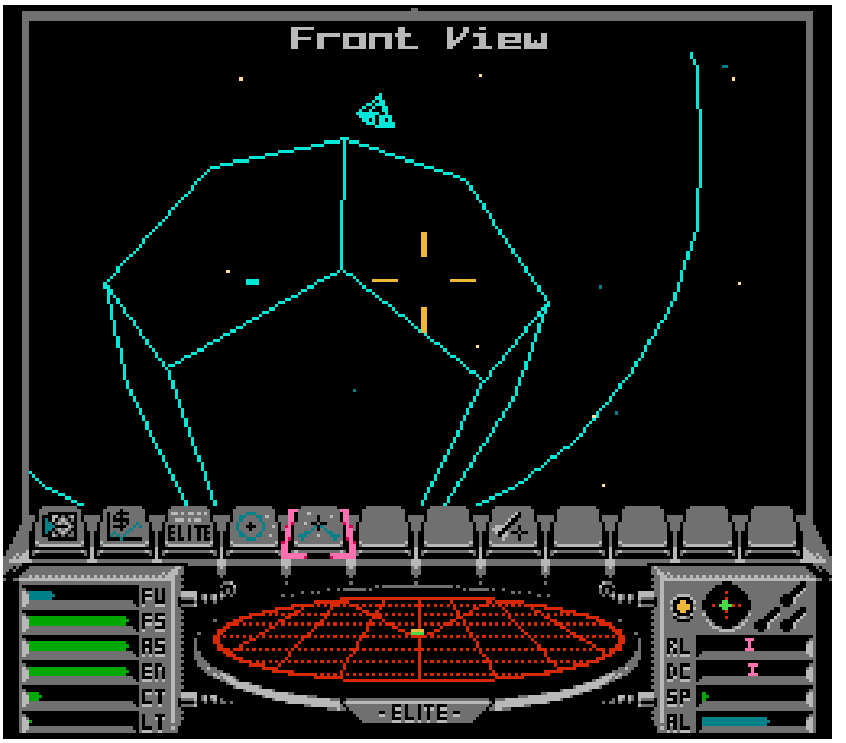
NES ELITE

Nintendo developed and manufactured their own 8-bit gaming console, known as the Famicom, and released it to the Japanese market in 1983. It featured a Ricoh 2A03 8-bit processor (running a MOS Technology 6502 core), and had two controller ports.

The console, rebranded as the Nintendo Entertainment System (NES), was released in North America during 1985, Euope in 1986, and Australasia during 1987. The NES is often credited as saving the US video games industry following the 1983 crash.

It was not until 1991 that Elite was released on the NES by Imagineer. The NES had by that point well established itself as an outstanding platform games machines that was eminently capable of handling sprites. To be able generate the fast-moving graphics of Elite was something else entirely.

Below: The familiar Cobra Mk III rotates on the NES.



Above: NES Elite features a brilliant icon-based menu system.

Up to this point Elite had been released on countless home computers all equipped with keyboards. As a games console, the ES had no such interface available. Instead, the developers created an ingenious on-screen icon-based interface for users to navigate their way through Elite's complex menu system.

The NES itself was not capable of saving any game data directly. This was not necessarily a problem for the vast majority of platformer games that were released. Some games required more than few hours to complete, and so required some method to save one's progress. In these cases, the cartridges themselves were fitted with a backup battery and NVRAM to provide for saved games. The Elite cartridge used this method to allow Commanders to save their progress as they advanced towards the ranking of Elite.

The NES conversion was released in English, German, French, Italian and Spanish language versions.

Nintendo Magazine System scored NES Elite 91/100 in its game review.

Screenshots courtesy FrontierAstro.co.uk

16-Bit Console ELITE: Almost a Reality

Elite was ported to almost every major home computer of its era, however it only ever saw official release on a single games console. Games consoles themselves were not new technology. The Atari 2600 had been around for 7 years by the time Elite was released, although it would struggle to run a game like Elite.

A number of capable 8-bit consoles hit the market during the mid-80s, and by the turn of the decade the first wave of 16-bit consoles were on their way.

The logical follow-up platform for Elite would have been the Super Nintendo Entertainment System, or SNES. The SNES is a 16-bit games console first released in Japan in 1990 and in North America in 1991. It wasn't until 1992 before the PAL version was released across Europe and Australia.

An article in issue 9 of Nintendo Magazine System told of how Hybrid Technology, who developed the Acorn Archimedes conversion, were developing a version for the SNES that would utilise the Super FX 3D chip. The Super FX was a specialised RISC CPU that was used to create 3D polygons, texture mapping and light source shading in many SNES games.

Right: A screenshot from Hybrid Technology's unreleased SNES conversion.

Screenshots courtesy Nintendo Magazine System

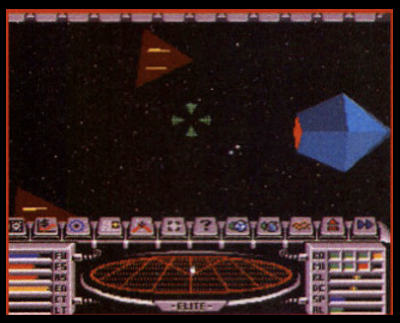
The following issue revealed that Elite would not use the Super FX chip, but would instead make use of the SNES's hi-res mode to deliver a smooth frame rate.

Issue 10 also revealed for the first time actual screen shots from the developing game (issue 9 used Amiga screenshots).

"Hybrid Technology were developing a version of Elite for the SNES..."

The article also reported some new features including a "planet buster" bomb and an icon-based interface (similar to the NES version).

Both articles told that Hybrid Technology had not yet found a publisher for the conversion. History tells us that unfortunately they never did, leaving the NES to remain the only console port of Elite.

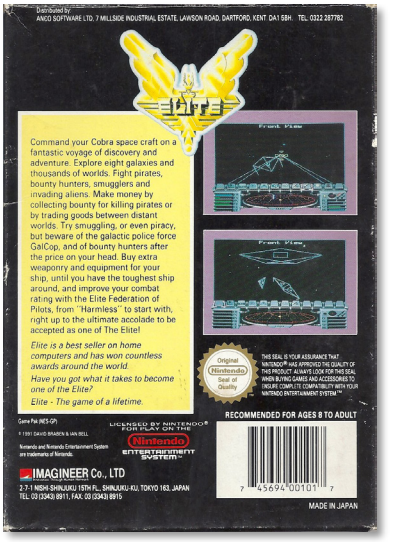


Above: The SNES version would have used icons like the NES version.

Hybrid Technology created two tech demos of Elite in 1994 that ran on the Sega Genesis and on the Nintendo Game Boy. Neither were released.

Super NES owners will soon be able to savour the intergalactic delights of Elite - in what could quite possibly be THE ultimate version ever! Coded by newcomers Hybrid, Super NES Elite is a simply stunning affair which uses theSFX chip giving a fast-moving and totally believable playing environment creating the closest thing to a 'proper' space opera yet. NMS has had a very sneak peek at the game, and the combination of Mode 7 jiggery-pokery and detailed planets makes this an absolute blinder to look at. In addition, the original gameplay has survived the conversion intact. News on who is set to release Elite has yet to be announced, but as soon as this and a release date have been confirmed, expect a massive preview of this potentially-blinding game.

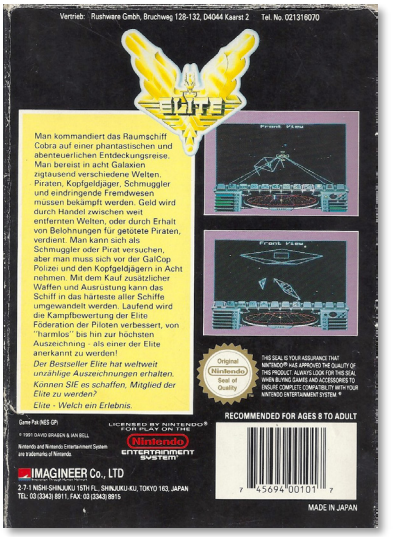
NES EL UKV



CONTENTS CHECKLIST:

- ☐ Nintendo game box
- ☐ Game manual
- ☐ Game cartridge
- ☐ Cartridge sleeve

NES EL NOE



CONTENTS CHECKLIST:

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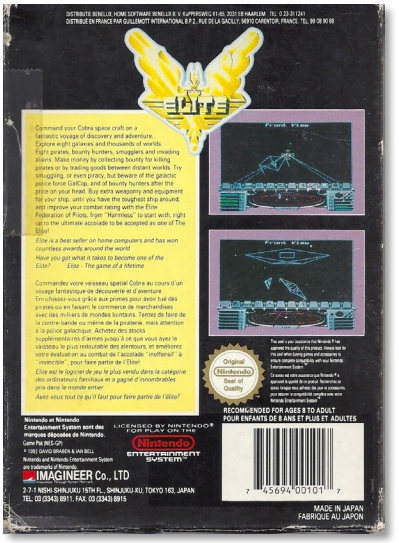
- ☐ Game manual
- ☐ Game cartridge
- ☐ Cartridge sleeve

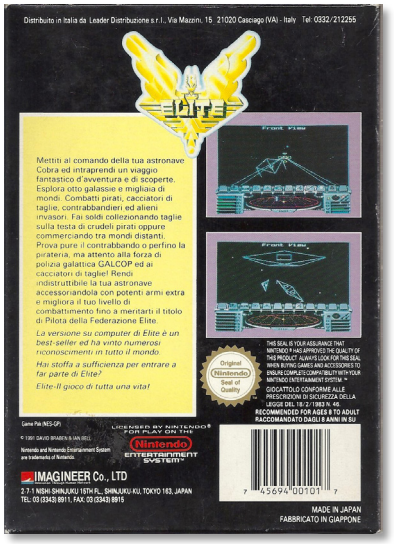
NES EL FRA



CONTENTS CHECKLIST:

- ☐ Nintendo game box
- ☐ Game manual
- ☐ Game cartridge
- ☐ Cartridge sleeve

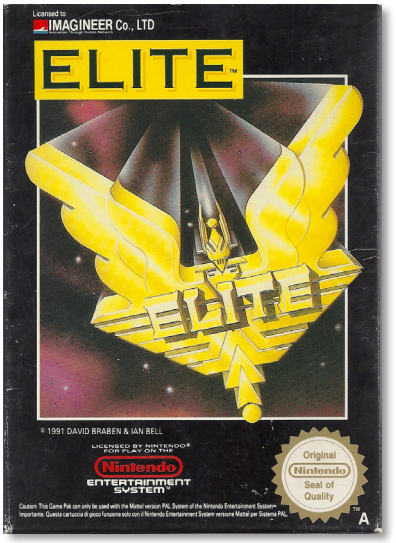
NES EL ITA

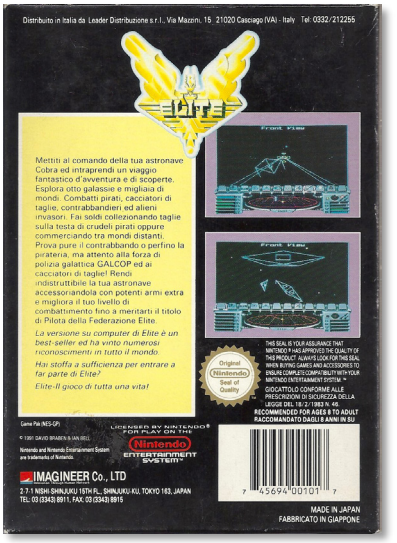


CONTENTS CHECKLIST:

- ☐ Nintendo game box
- ☐ Game manual
- ☐ Game cartridge
- ☐ Cartridge sleeve

NES EL ESP





CONTENTS CHECKLIST:

- ☐ Nintendo game box
- ☐ Game manual
- ☐ Game cartridge
- ☐ Cartridge sleeve

Chapter Nineteen

ELITE

SAM Coupé & SAM Elite

"ELITE was one of the marvels of the mid 80s"

1996, SAM Coupé Elite Quick Key Control Guide

The rare SAM Coupé ELITE conversion released by Revelation Software in 1996

MEMORIES OF ELITE ON

THE SAM COUPÉ

by Steve Longhurst

I remember reading about Elite in an issue of Your Spectrum, before I even had a Spectrum. I bought what turned out to be the last couple of issues of Your Spectrum and was definitely hooked on getting a home computer. Christmas 1985 my parents got a Spectrum+ "for the home", although it was me that got the lions share of use out of it, being 11 years old and primed for the computer age.

At some point in early 1986 I finally got a copy of Elite. The big box, cassette, Dark Wheel novella, poster, keyboard overlay and Lenslock. I was always a sucker for the large filled boxes (Microprose Gunship was a good one). Initially, I don't remember being bowled away by playing it. It was pretty hard core for a young kid, I was probably a failure at manual docking for one thing, and the game took quite some effort and patience to get into.

Cassette based loading and saving was almost certainly a chore too much, especially when you really needed to save before each hyperspace.

So, my 'first encounter' with Elite came and went, with me barely reaching average. Fast forward to early 1990 and I had got myself a Sam Coupé early on in it's short life (it was supposed to be out for Christmas 1989, but very few people got theirs before the new year).

The Sam was natively compatible with Spectrum 48k games, and with the right software, you could 'snapshot' a Spectrum game that was running, and save it's memory image to disc. This 'instant save' feature and the subsequent rapid disc loading suddenly made playing Elite a joy.

The frame rate was faster, the Z80 CPU in the Sam was at least 3 times faster than the original Spectrum. I was older and more mature too, and almost the moment I started playing, I got totally into it.

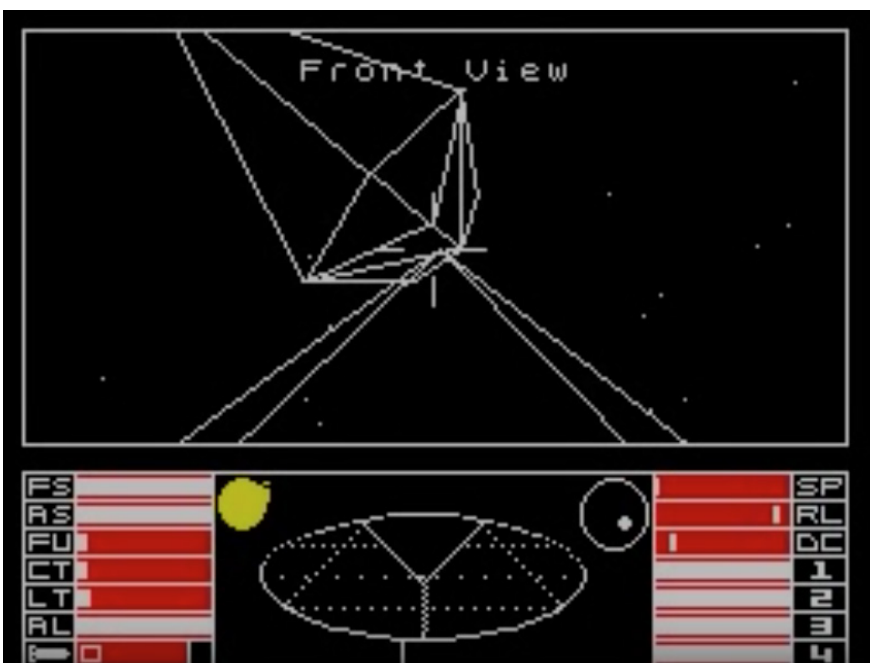
Elite feeds the imagination. It doesn't give you everything, you need to fill in all the blanks. The imagery of the different planets, the social systems, the trade routes, the ship upgrades, mining, bounty hunting, slave trading, narcotics dealing, it went on. Second time through, I still didn't make it to Elite status, but I'm pretty sure I got as far as Deadly.

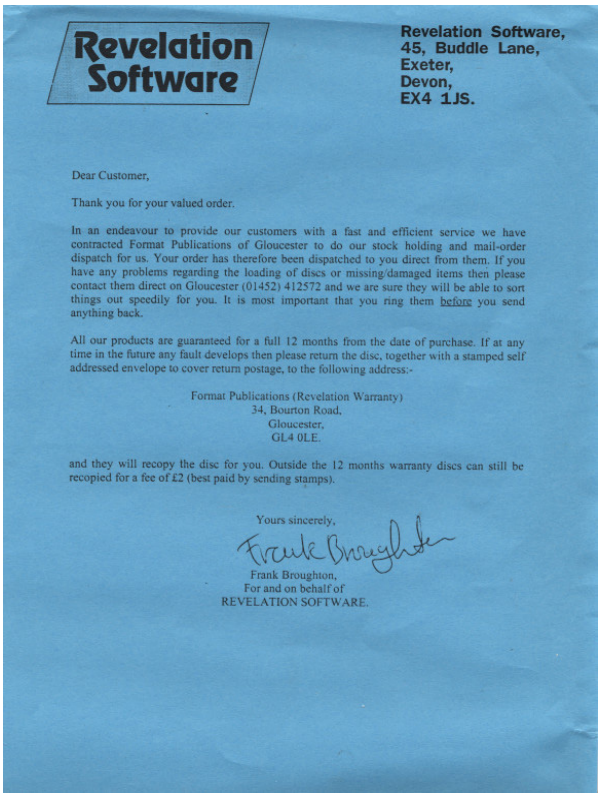
I remember hours and hours of play, it consumed my thoughts day after day, and no other game taxed my Quickshot 2 Turbo joystick as much.

When a Sam Coupé 'native' version of Elite was eventually released sometime in the mid 1990's, I bought a copy for completeness. It turned out to be the exact same Spectrum version I had played using the snapshot feature, several years earlier, just with the load/save routine built in.

I haven't played the game since the 1990's, but I remember the feeling of playing it, like it was yesterday, and playing Elite: Dangerous today gives me that same feeling!

Steve Longhurst





Revelation Software

Revelation Software,
45, Buddle Lane,
Exeter,
Devon,
EX4 1JS.

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Yours sincerely,

Frank Broughton

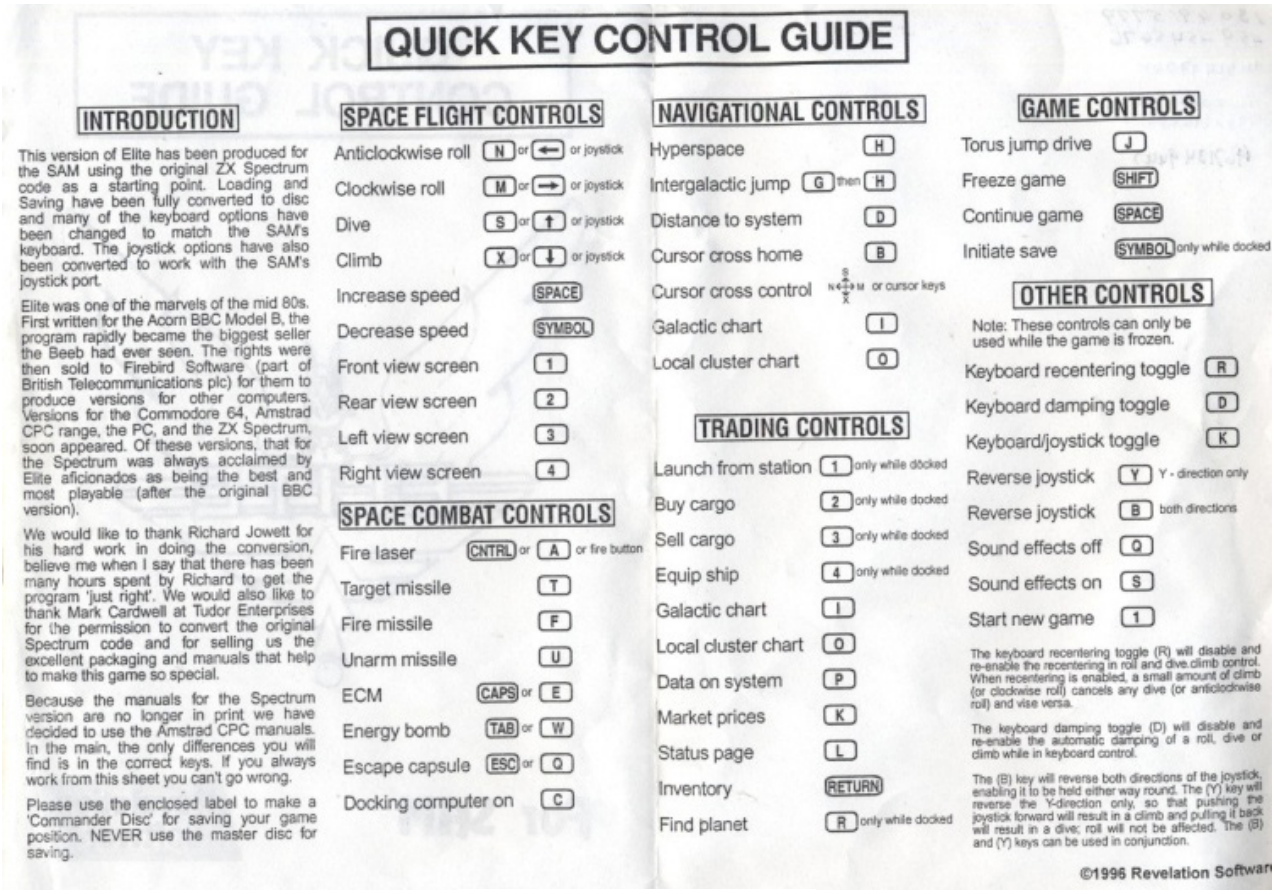
Frank Broughton,
For and on behalf of
REVELATION SOFTWARE.

The SAM Coupé is an 8-bit home computer first released in 1989 for £169.95 and discontinued in 1992. It features a Zilog Z80B CPU running at 6 MHz and is considered by many to be a ZX Spectrum clone. The SAM Elite, an upgraded model, was released towards the end of the run and featured 512kB of RAM. Only around 12,000 units of the Coupé and Elite computers are thought to have been sold.

ELITE for the SAM was coded by Richard Jowett and was produced by Revelation Software. It was released in 1996 on a 3.5 inch floppy disk. The code was based on the ZX Spectrum port with differences in the keyboard mapping and SAM Coupé disk loading sequences.

The game was presented in a re-labeled Firebird box (Amstrad in the case of the example shown opposite) and includes the donor game manual along with a printed SAM Coupé key guide and a warranty letter from Revelation Software.

This is one of the rarest conversions of ELITE making it near impossible to locate a mint and complete example.



QUICK KEY CONTROL GUIDE

INTRODUCTION

This version of Elite has been produced for the SAM using the original ZX Spectrum code as a starting point. Loading and Saving have been fully converted to disc and many of the keyboard options have been changed to match the SAM's keyboard. The joystick options have also been converted to work with the SAM's joystick port.

Elite was one of the marvels of the mid 80s. First written for the Acorn BBC Model B, the program rapidly became the biggest seller the Beeb had ever seen. The rights were then sold to Firebird Software (part of British Telecommunications plc) for them to produce versions for other computers. Versions for the Commodore 64, Amstrad CPC range, the PC, and the ZX Spectrum, soon appeared. Of these versions, that for the Spectrum was always acclaimed by Elite aficionados as being the best and most playable (after the original BBC version).

We would like to thank Richard Jowett for his hard work in doing the conversion, believe me when I say that there has been many hours spent by Richard to get the program 'just right'. We would also like to thank Mark Cardwell at Tudor Enterprises for the permission to convert the original Spectrum code and for selling us the excellent packaging and manuals that help to make this game so special.

Because the manuals for the Spectrum version are no longer in print we have decided to use the Amstrad CPC manuals. In the main, the only differences you will find is in the correct keys. If you always work from this sheet you can't go wrong.

Please use the enclosed label to make a 'Commander Disc' for saving your game position. NEVER use the master disc for saving.

SPACE FLIGHT CONTROLS

Anticlockwise roll	N or ← or joystick
Clockwise roll	M or → or joystick
Dive	S or ↑ or joystick
Climb	X or ↓ or joystick
Increase speed	SPACE
Decrease speed	SYMBOL
Front view screen	1
Rear view screen	2
Left view screen	3
Right view screen	4

SPACE COMBAT CONTROLS

Fire laser	CNTRL or A or fire button
Target missile	T
Fire missile	F
Unarm missile	U
ECM	CAPS or E
Energy bomb	TAB or W
Escape capsule	ESC or Q
Docking computer on	C

NAVIGATIONAL CONTROLS

Hyperspace	H
Intergalactic jump	G then H
Distance to system	D
Cursor cross home	B
Cursor cross control	S N X M or cursor keys
Galactic chart	I
Local cluster chart	O

TRADING CONTROLS

Launch from station	1 only while docked
Buy cargo	2 only while docked
Sell cargo	3 only while docked
Equip ship	4 only while docked
Galactic chart	I
Local cluster chart	O
Data on system	P
Market prices	K
Status page	L
Inventory	RETURN
Find planet	R only while docked

GAME CONTROLS

Torus jump drive	J
Freeze game	SHIFT
Continue game	SPACE
Initiate save	SYMBOL only while docked

OTHER CONTROLS

Note: These controls can only be used while the game is frozen.

Keyboard recentering toggle	R
Keyboard damping toggle	D
Keyboard/joystick toggle	K
Reverse joystick	Y Y - direction only
Reverse joystick	B both directions
Sound effects off	Q
Sound effects on	S
Start new game	1

The keyboard recentering toggle (R) will disable and re-enable the recentering in roll and dive.climb control. When recentering is enabled, a small amount of climb (or clockwise roll) cancels any dive (or anticlockwise roll) and vise versa.

The keyboard damping toggle (D) will disable and re-enable the automatic damping of a roll, dive or climb while in keyboard control.

The (B) key will reverse both directions of the joystick, enabling it to be held either way round. The (Y) key will reverse the Y-direction only, so that pushing the joystick forward will result in a climb and pulling it back will result in a dive; roll will not be affected. The (B) and (Y) keys can be used in conjunction.

©1996 Revelation Softwar

SAM Coupé and SAM Elite

CONTENTS CHECKLIST:

- ☐ SAM Coupé game box
- ☐ SAM Coupé Quick Key Control Guide
- ☐ The Dark Wheel novella
- ☐ Ship Identification Chart
- ☐ Warranty letter
- ☐ SAM Coupé game disk

Chapter Twenty

ELITE Plus

IBM PC

"Now the game has been updated with 1990s technology: state of the art 3-D graphics, new, scintillating sounds, enhanced animation speed and more missions."

ELITE Plus game box text

ELITE: INTO THE 90s

Elite has gone through many updates over the years, but never before has an update been made for a machine upon which Elite was previously released.

IBM PCs and compatibles are an exception, and understandably so as the computer architecture has continually evolved unlike static systems such as the Commodore 64 or Amstrad CPC.

Elite was originally released for the IBM PCs and compatibles by Firebird in 1986. That version itself was evolutionary in that featured solid polygons for the first time in an Elite game.

In 1986 PCs were equipped with 286 CPUs and were running DOS 2.0. Bus speeds were around 6 to 8 MHz, memory around 512k and graphics were only CGA. Elite Plus maintained the same gameplay, but updated the graphics, the sound and added more missions.

For the first time, Elite was available on 3.5” floppy disk (and later on CD-ROM) for the PC. Elite Plus now offered graphics in MCGA, EGA and VGA modes providing an experience more in line with that on the Amiga and Atari ST versions.

The interface was changed from the original BBC Micro style lists, to a an icon based menu system more like that found on the Nintendo NES version.

Sound support was now added for both Ad-Lib and Roland sound boards.

Released by Rainbird in the UK and by Microplay (a division of Microprose) in the USA, the conversion for Elite Plus was completed by Chris Sawyer who went on to work on Frontier: Elite II and Frontier First Encounters.

Elite Plus was not the last conversion, nor was it considered to be the best, but it certainly added to the rich tapestry of the Elite universe.

Opposite: The Elite Plus loader screen; Above: System data now included graphics showing lifeforms and planets; Left: The familiar rotating spaceships remained, though now in solid 3-D.

ELITE PLUS

5.25” FLOPPY DISK MICROPLAY VERSION (USA)

CONTENTS CHECKLIST:

- ☐ Elite Plus game box
- ☐ Elite Plus manual
- ☐ Elite Plus 5.25” game disks
- ☐ Elite Plus special offer insert

ELITE PLUS

3.5” FLOPPY DISK MICROPLAY VERSION (USA)

CONTENTS CHECKLIST:

- ☐ Elite Plus game box
- ☐ Elite Plus manual
- ☐ Elite Plus 3.5” game disk

ELITE PLUS

3.5” FLOPPY DISK RAINBIRD VERSION (UK/Europe)

CONTENTS CHECKLIST:

☐ Game box

☐ Manual

☐ Game disk

ELITE PLUS

CD-ROM VERSIONS

CONTENTS CHECKLIST:

- ☐ CD jewel case with insert
- ☐ Manual
- ☐ Game CD-ROM
- ☐ PC protection code sheet

CONTENTS CHECKLIST:

- ☐ CD jewel case with insert
- ☐ Manual
- ☐ Game CD-ROM

Chapter Twenty One

ELITE Plus

NEC PC-98

コブラ・マーク3

“Cobra Mk III” written in Japanese

from the NEC PC98 Elite Plus manual

The PC-98 computer range was manufactured by NEC from 1982 and saw many upgrades to the design. The PC-98 series was the main computer in the Japanese market and did not see a dedicated western release. By 1999 more than 18 million PC-98 units had been sold.

The PC-98 conversion of ELITE Plus was released in 1992. At the time a typical PC-98 was running a 386DX/20 MHz CPU and between 1MB to 4MB of RAM.

The PC-98 manual was translated to Japanese, however screenshots within the manual still showed the use of English in-game.

This conversion is amongst the rarest as it was not released to the western market.

NEC PC-98

CONTENTS CHECKLIST:

- ☐ PC-98 Elite Plus game box
- ☐ PC-98 Elite Plus game manual
- ☐ PC-98 3.5” game disk
- ☐ PC-98 technical supplement
- ☐ PC-98 addendum

Chapter Twenty Two

ELITE

Acorn Archimedes

"Have you got what it takes to become one of the Elite?"

ELITE Acorn Archimedes game box text

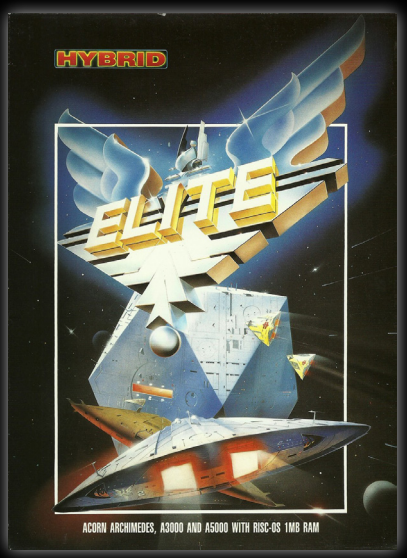
The Acorn Archimedes (pictured) saw ELITE return back home after 7 long years of success on multiple platforms. The Archimedes was manufactured by Acorn Computers who also produced the BBC Microcomputer and Electron.

ELITE MEETS ARCHIMEDES

Published by Hybrid (1991), a ground-up rebuild by Warren Burch and Clive Gringras, the Archimedes version of Elite (commonly referred to as simply 'ArcElite') is an achievement in its own right; however, it is far more than simply a re-write.

True it has a number of new ship types (Bushmaster, Caiman etc.) and adds variants of some of these, resulting in some seeing this version as not quite true to the original; though I believe these aspects only serve to enrich the Elite universe.

Visually, the interface and environment are similar to versions such as PC Elite Plus with graphical representation of ship equipment screen, full colour / filled ships, stations and planets, with some additional nice features such as moons and surface detail on planets (albeit simply dots overlaying fill colour).



"...deemed by many to be the best version of its era."

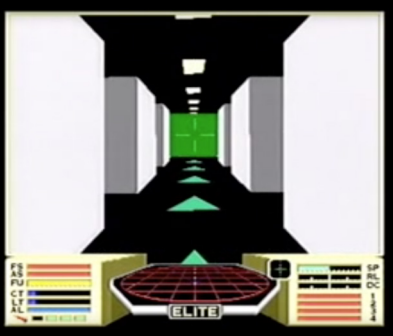
It is neither the graphical features or the variety of ships that really sets this version apart from the rest: The very first time one sees a squadron of vipers pass by in perfect formation or pirates preying on some innocent trade ship you realise that you are not the centre of this universe.

In other versions, everyone shoots at you (or if in a station safe zone, at those shooting you) and whilst this fact goes unnoticed to players of these versions, as soon as you start to play ArcElite you begin to feel you are part of something bigger, a universe that is much more alive.

Watching solitary miners blasting asteroids or a group of pirates attack a space station, with a Cobra blasting anything that attempts to leave really does give ArcElite the wow-factor even today.

In short, giving the Archimedes version a similar polish to later versions of Elite and then supercharging it by moving away from player-centric roots, something truly beautiful was created. No surprise then, that it is deemed by many to be the best version of its era.

Reviewed by Roland Powell



ACORN ARCHIMEDES

REGULAR EDITION

CONTENTS CHECKLIST:

- ☐ Game box
- ☐ Flight Training Manual
- ☐ User guide
- ☐ Keyboard overlay
- ☐ Game disk
- ☐ Elite shirt order form
- ☐ Registration card
- ☐ Additional information sheet

ACORN ARCHIMEDES

GOLD EDITION

CONTENTS CHECKLIST:

- ☐ Game box
- ☐ Flight Training Manual
- ☐ User guide
- ☐ Keyboard overlay
- ☐ Training record pad
- ☐ 24 Ship data cards (not shown)
- ☐ Game disk
- ☐ Poster (not shown)
- ☐ Elite shirt order form
- ☐ Registration card
- ☐ Additional information sheet

Dear Commanders,

Thank you very much for your generous support and for being a part of this backer review process.

We hope that you have enjoyed the first part of the ELITE journey and, like us, have learned a few new things about this ground breaking game.

Please provide any feedback via email direct to us at elitearchives@icloud.com

We will return with the final part soon...

TO BE CONTINUED...